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Wm Dudley Foulke

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A STORY OF YUCATAN

BY

WM. DUDLEY FOULKE

ILLUSTRATED

SECOND EDITION

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INTRODUCTORY

THE peninsula of Yucatan, projecting northward into the Gulf of Mexico, which it separates from the Caribbean Sea, is above all other regions of the earth a fit abode for the mysterious and the supernatural. The Spaniard who dwells amid more genial surroundings will tell you that it is *un pais muy tríste,* "a very sad land." And this it is especially during the dry season, which begins with our winter and ends in May—a season when the forests are stripped of their foliage and innumerable trunks and branches, twisted and gnarled, wave their grotesque arms like hosts of spectres. Upon the ground there is no hint of the green herbage of our more temperate climes, no river, brook, nor glistening of laughing water anywhere ; the rain which still falls occasionally near the beginning and end of the long drouth steams

up from the hot soil or is sucked through crannies of the limestone into pools far down amid the dark recesses of the earth.

For great caverns lie below, profound abysses into whose depths the inhabitants of cities now in ruins used to betake themselves for water until their steps have worn deep pathways in the stone.

It is a low flat land, as monotonous as Sahara—with stunted hills and stunted trees —with a sun which hurls its rays upon the earth till all things hide, or slinks behind a mass of clouds as sullen and sombre as the land—with an air which stifles the throat that breathes it at noonday, and brings the exhalations of miasma with the chill of night —with thickets impenetrable filled with noisome insects and venomous reptiles, but with no shade nor cheer. Apart from the towns and straggling villages which are clustered near the coast, and excepting occasional haciendas, devoted mainly to the culture of hennequin (a variety of the century plant, used for the manufacture of hemp), such to-day is the wild land upon which half a hundred ruined cities, many of them vast and beautiful, have already been

discovered, while perhaps others are still hidden in the wilderness.

For explorations are still going on in the interior, which is inhabited by wild tribes of Indians who lurk in its recesses and sometimes beset the path of the wayfarer or wage a desultory war against the government. And yet the finely chiselled features and delicate limbs of this fierce race bear witness that it is the offspring of a people far different from that which dwells upon the land to-day. Indeed, the civilised Indians and the Mestizos (descendants of the same Maya stock, intermingled more or less with Spanish blood), who constitute the farm labourers and the artisans of Yucatan, are a people kind, docile, courteous, hospitable, scrupulously clean and fairly industrious, honest and intelligent even after their long service as hewers of wood and drawers of water for their Castilian masters. One cannot compare these Mestizos with the mongrel inhabitants of other parts of Mexico without a feeling that the Maya ancestor must have been far ahead of his Aztec neighbour in those things which go to the making up of character.

Perhaps the "sad land" upon which the

Mayas established their abodes was itself one of the causes of their superiority. It was in barren Attica that Greek civilisation reached its highest development. It was upon the shores of New England that our own best institutions first took root. In like manner, it was upon the "Maayha" peninsula, the "land without water" (for this is one of the interpretations of the word), that there were found the noblest illustrations of the culture of our Western continent before the coming of the European.

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MAYA

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CHAPTER I

THE CASTAWAYS

AT the beginning of the year 1512, when our story opens, the white man had not yet set foot in Yucatan. But the great islands of Fernandina (or Cuba) and Hispaniola (which we call San Domingo) had passed into Spanish hands, and from these islands expeditions had set out in various directions for the conquest of unknown lands. One of the most important was that which had established upon the isthmus of Panama the settlement of Darien. This expedition had fallen under the command of Balboa; among his followers was one Valdivia, who was afterwards sent back to Hispaniola to make report of the doings of his chief, to procure provisions,

and to convey to the royal treasury a considerable quantity of gold.

Off the coast of Jamaica, Valdivia was overtaken by a hurricane, and his small caravel, a clumsy craft to battle with a storm, was soon dismantled. It filled with water, lay for a time at the mercy of the waves, and finally sank upon the shoals known as Caymanes, or the Alligators.

Valdivia and his crew, twenty in all, took refuge in an open boat. They had no sail, their oars had been broken by the storm, and they could make no headway against wind and current. For thirteen days they drifted helplessly. They were tortured by the pangs of thirst, and one after another perished, until seven had been cast into the sea, where their bodies quickly became the prey of the sharks, whose long sharp fins were seen above the water gliding silently and smoothly close to the side of the boat.

At last, on a day when hope was wholly dead among the survivors, they came in sight of land. With all the strength left in their exhausted bodies they struggled to reach the shore, and finally landed on a narrow strip of beach. Just beyond was a low ledge of rock where thickets grew, and

at whose edge the palms curved outward and then rose tall and stately toward the sky. Here the wanderers sank upon the warm smooth sand in utter weariness.

Suddenly from the thickets there dashed forth a multitude of dark-skinned natives. Most of these had no other garment than a long cotton cloth wound about the loins, but a few, who seemed of greater dignity, wore short sleeveless tunics embroidered in bright colours and extending to the knees. Their long matted hair was coiled round their heads and decked with the plumage of tropical birds. Many carried bows and arrows or brandished spears with heads of flint; a few had large two-handed swords of hard wood with sharp flint edges.

Some ran quickly toward the boat, dragged it across the beach, and broke it in pieces on the rocks at the edge of the forest; others surrounded the forlorn wanderers, who, too weak to resist, were easily made captives. Their hands were bound with strong cords, and they were led to an Indian village, where they passed through a multitude of women and children, and were taken into an enclosure surrounded by high palisades. Within was a large

oval cabin or lodge, built of round poles placed close together, plastered and covered by a steep thatched roof of palm leaves. Their cords were loosed and their captors brought them water, honey, and cakes of maize, together with fish and fowls.

Here then were shelter and refreshment, and the captives began to hope that they had fallen into kindly hands. But after they had eaten, they were bound again, and led into the lodge. Worn out by exposure and suffering, they lay, some upon hammocks which they found suspended from the ridge-poles of the building, and some upon beds made of cane network set upon short posts and overspread with mats; and before the night closed in, they covered their dreadful memories and uncertain apprehensions with the mantle of a deep, unbroken sleep.

When they awoke, the village was astir. The gate of their enclosure had been opened, and the people of the place had gathered to gaze upon the strange beings and wonder at their light skins, their beards, and curious clothing. The Spaniards could not understand what was said, but from the gestures they thought the

natives seemed to remark how weak and thin they were, and when abundant food was offered them they took it as a proof of kindness and sympathy. They were suffered to live in idleness and great reverence was paid them, yet they were freed from their fetters only while they were eating. They could not understand the reason for this, but since their meal-time was their only hour of liberty they naturally wished to prolong it. To this their guards did not object, but always waited patiently till they were done. Eggs, game, rice, fruits, and a strange sort of wine, not very good to taste, but quite intoxicating, were added to their diet. They ate heartily, and it was not long until they had grown strong and well again.

One of their number, Jeronimo de Aguilar, was a priest. Whenever his arms were released from their fetters he held up a small crucifix which hung from his neck, while his companions fell upon their knees in prayer, and on several occasions when the wine was offered them he endeavoured, in rude fashion, to celebrate the mass. His captors looked on with interest and curiosity, and upon a sign from him they followed

the Spaniards in the outward postures and signs of devotion, as if willing to join in adoration of the strange deity.

After the Spaniards had remained perhaps two months in this captivity, they noticed one morning that a great crowd had gathered in the village. Multitudes arrayed in bright apparel had come from the country round about, and in an open square in front of their prison all was made ready for a great feast. The houses were bedecked with flowers, and the prisoners saw through the chinks of the palisades that there were many garlands upon the sides and summit of a flat-topped pyramid on one side of the square. They had noticed that there was a broad, steep stairway on one side of this pyramid, and a stone cornice just below the level surface on top, and they wondered what could be the purpose of such a building. It towered high above the houses of the town, and seemed to have been made for distinction and show. There was a large stone near the middle of the flat area at the summit, and another smaller one in front. This day they saw many Indians climbing the stairway and scattering flowers along the way.

Evidently some public ceremonial was at hand. The captives also noticed that other dignitaries had arrived ; a few of these wore upon their heads gold fillets with bright feathers, and one carried in his hand a broad flint knife.

The gates opened,—Valdivia and four of his companions, the largest and stoutest of the company, were selected and led forth, they knew not whither, through a silent and respectful multitude.

An hour afterwards those who remained saw their companions dragged naked up the steep steps of the pyramid. The image of a god, grotesquely shaped in clay, was carried before them, and placed upon the large stone on top, and one after another each of the captives was stretched on the smaller stone by four of the long-robed priests, while a fifth threw over his neck a wooden yoke, shaped like a snake, pressing it down to strangle him, and a sixth, more richly arrayed than the rest, opened the breast of the victim with a knife, and tore out his heart, which was held, still smoking and palpitating, up to the sun, and then dashed in the face of the idol. After the sacrifice, the body of each of the slaughtered men

was cast down the steep sides of the pyramid, and borne away by attendants who were in waiting below.

More horrible still was the scene that followed; for the prisoners could see upon tables in the open square, amid the venison and wild fowl and bread and wine and honey, a new, strange viand, more eagerly devoured than any other by the brutal multitude that sat, crowned with garlands, at the festival.

So this was to be the end of their captivity! And when would it come to those who were still alive? How long would the bloody festival continue? The survivors observed that the feast was followed by a drunken orgy in which all the men took part, even their own guards, to whom wine and food had been given in abundance.

They now saw their chance for escape. Hitherto they had made no attempt of the sort, because a wandering life in the wilderness had seemed as much to be dreaded as the evils of bondage. But now, with death staring them in the face, they must act and act quickly. Their keepers had fallen into a heavy sleep. One of the captives, Gonzalo Guerrero, a rough sailor, gnawed

asunder the cord which bound the hands of Aguilar, and the priest, thus freed from his fetters, released his companions. Seizing the weapons of their guards, the Spaniards waited until nightfall had shrouded the village, then, tearing open the gate, they rushed into the open square in front of it. Happily they found amid the drunken throng none who were able to capture them, and they ran at full speed to the nearest thickets. Some women followed for a time, screaming and pelting them with stones, but the fugitives were soon lost in the darkness. Later in the night the moon rose and by its aid they struggled on until they deemed themselves safe from pursuit, when they took refuge in a small cavern hidden in a thick grove and awaited the coming of the morning.

CHAPTER II

THE FUGITIVES

GLAD though they were to escape their present doom, when they reflected upon their condition, they found it pitiful enough. What hope was there that they could ever rejoin their countrymen? They supposed that the region where they had landed was a vast island, in which, even if they should escape the doom of their companions, they must remain prisoners forever. They had taken bows and arrows from their keepers and they could make others for themselves. Birds of every kind were abundant,— turkey, quail, and pheasants as well as larger game, wild hogs and deer,— and they believed that they could always find food in the wilderness. Their chief fear was of the lack of water, for they noticed that there were no streams in the

forest, and although it was still the rainy season, and there were occasional pools for present use, the fugitives were filled with dread as to what would happen when the dry season should begin. They determined therefore not to rest until they had found some lake or river which would assure them a constant supply.

They resolved to travel by night, the better to avoid discovery. In the daytime they would hide in the forest, going forth only in pursuit of food.

Thus they wandered for many weeks, but found no lake nor river. They made rude hammocks and they built each day out of leaves and branches a shelter against sun and rain. They had a plentiful supply of game, but they suffered greatly on account of the unwholesome climate. First one and then another was seized with the fever so prevalent in the low-lands of the tropics, and the sickness of one often detained the others for many days. They proceeded with great caution from the fear of meeting bands of natives or of coming suddenly upon some Indian town, and for a long time they eluded observation. One day, however, while two of their number were

lying ill, the others, who were hunting in the neighbourhood, were seen by an Indian who brought the news back to his village. The same night the Spaniards were surrounded, and after a short struggle all were made prisoners again.

They were distributed as slaves among the chief men of the community, and in many ways their fate seemed more cruel than during their earlier captivity. They were fed scantily and compelled to work at the hardest and most degrading tasks. They were cruelly beaten, their clothing and all that they had saved from the wreck were taken from them, even the crucifix of Aguilar, although the priest was allowed to keep his breviary. They were threatened with death and torture whenever they failed to do the bidding of their masters. They were pinioned each night by the wrists to strong stakes driven into the ground. Little mercy was shown them even in sickness, and during the weary months that followed, one after another succumbed to fever and suffering until all but three had perished.

CHAPTER III

GUERRERO AND AGUILAR

GUERRERO and Aguilar, the two captives who had fallen to the lot of Ahkin Xooc, the chief, fared better than the rest. Their master died soon after they were taken, and they became the slaves of Taxmar, his successor.

Once when an embassy set out to make a league of friendship with Nachan Can, the neighbouring chief of Chatemal, Guerrero was sent as a gift, with copal, cacao, cotton cloth, and Indian damsels. He soon became useful to his new master—he was dextrous in making tools and weapons, he was skilful with bow and arrow, and best of all he aided his chief by a well-laid plan of attack against a tribe which was at war with Chatemal. His master won the battle, wherein much booty

and many prisoners were taken, and the grateful Nachan Can now commanded Guerrero to be baptised according to the Maya rites, and to wed one of the chief maidens of the tribe—a buxom damsel, not quite such a one as he might have chosen in his native town of Palos, but a girl strong, lithe, agile, and good-humoured—by far the most palatable morsel among the maidens of her race.

Guerrero was thrown into great confusion by this command. His refusal would no doubt awaken the religious zeal of his offended master, and Nachan Can might well deem it his duty to devote his captive to the gods with other prisoners who were to be sacrificed at a coming festival.

The old sailor had been a sad dog during his roving life, and was not ready to die. Still he had some qualms of conscience at turning his back upon the saints, the angels, the Virgin, and the Holy Trinity. But then, during the past few months what had the saints, the angels, the Virgin, and the Holy Trinity done for him? Why not seize the present opportunity for life and comfort? This baptism and wedding were mere forms, he could make what mental reser-

vations he pleased, and if he should ever get out of that wretched country, he would repent with all his heart and God would surely forgive him. If not, he would have at least a few years of grace before perdition.

Such were the sophistries of his unlettered mind. Life is sweet even in Yucatan.

So he went through the baptismal ceremony with his secret reservations, he took to himself the dusky princess and he became a great man of the tribe.

But a downward step is not easily retaken. He had indeed professed the faith of the Mayas, but he had not yet given those unalterable proofs of his sincerity which public opinion demanded. He must be tatooed! He must wear in ears and lips and nostrils the badges of his exalted rank!

So at last he underwent that painful process which would sever all hope of restoration to his kindred. His cheeks were decorated with the symbols of the strange religion -the sun, mystically portrayed in yellow and Kukulcan, the "serpent bedecked with feathers" worshipping. Heavy gold rings adorned his features. At last he had become beautiful and godlike!

He lived many years; children were born to him who inherited their father's talents and their mother's piety—for still it was observed that the father lacked zeal when he took part in the elaborate ceremonials and bloody rites of the people of Chatemal.

Some years afterwards, when Cortes (whose ships lay off the coast of Yucatan before his descent into Mexico) sent by a secret messenger a letter offering ransom for the Spanish captives, the old sailor had many pangs of regret, yet his lot had now been cast irrevocably with the tribe. He could not go home again without becoming an object of derision. Moreover, his wife and children with many tears besought him not to leave them, so he remained, and when at last he died, as we shall relate hereafter, let us hope that the good Lord, accepting his final penitence, allowed him to atone by a short stay in purgatory for a life of heresy born of such dire necessity.

The career of Aguilar, who had remained with Taxmar, was much more edifying. The poor priest, bereft even of his crucifix, was in sore straits, but had not his beloved Mother Church told him that after all it was

the heart and not the symbol which was the important matter for salvation? Each morning he might be seen upon his knees in prayer adoring an invisible deity, and when they threw him upon his face before their gods, he always cast his eyes above the horrible idols and seemed to look for succour to the skies.

Taxmar, however, was a man of sense; he worshipped the gods for what they could give him, nothing more, and seeing that oftentimes his sacrifices to Acanum brought him no game, and his offerings to Chaac brought him no crops, he had been filled with doubt as to the power of these deities to bring game, crops, and other essentials to happiness. Sometimes the gods would help him, but again they brought sorrow upon his people, so Taxmar began to look upon the strange faith of his captive with a skeptic's tolerance. Perhaps the Christian's God was as good as his own; why then should he not suffer his slave to indulge in this harmless worship?

Aguilar, like Guerrero, turned out to be a useful man. He served his chief with meekness and zeal. He was brave in battle and wise in council. The high-priest

of the tribe indeed had besought Taxmar to offer the stranger to the gods, and make an end of his silly superstitions, but Aguilar craftily said to his master :

"Thou canst do with me as thou wilt, but thou art far too wise to destroy one who is wholly devoted to thee."

So the cacique refused to part with him, preferring the certain services of his captive to the whimsical favours of uncertain deities. There are men who are like this to-day.

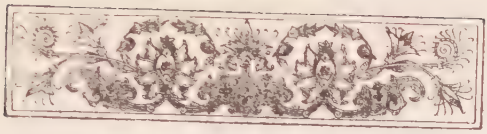
Then the high-priest talked of treachery and told the chief that the virtue of Aguilar was a pretence. There was one thing that neither of them could understand. The Spaniard had always kept aloof from women. Surely this must be deceit ! So a scheme was devised to test him. Taxmar sent the captive with a beautiful young slave girl to fish in the early morning in a distant lake. They were to spend the night upon its borders, and the girl had strict orders to beset the poor priest with the same temptation which the Devil once prepared for good St. Anthony. The night was cold, but Aguilar kindled a fire and slept alone upon the beach some distance

from the single hammock in which he had wrapped the maiden in warm skins. On their return she told to wondering ears the story of his strange behaviour, and so great became the confidence of the chief, that when Taxmar went to war he intrusted the priest with the management of his household — his wife, his slaves, and his children.

Years passed and a messenger arrived with Cortes' letter wound in the tresses of his hair. The heart of the poor exile leaped for joy, and he besought his master to accept the proffered ransom and let him go. He prevailed, and setting out with the messenger, he reached the spot whither Cortes had sent Ordaz, his lieutenant, with three small vessels to wait for the wanderers. Ordaz had already departed, but Cortes was still at the island of Cozumel, a few leagues from the coast. Aguilar hired a canoe with six oarsmen and they landed near the ships of the great captain. Here they were seized and brought before the commander. The poor priest, in aboriginal nakedness, with long hair and skin as brown as that of his companions, was taken for an Indian like the rest. He threw

himself upon the ground, and in broken Castilian (for he had almost forgotten his native tongue) he besought the protection of his countryman. Cortes welcomed him, gave him new garments, inquired with tenderness after his companions, and then carried the exile with him upon his campaign for the conquest of the Aztec kingdom.*

* Amid many conflicting accounts of the reception of Aguilar by Cortes, I have chosen that of Bernal Diaz, who was present. Aguilar afterwards became "regidor" of the City of Mexico.



CHAPTER IV

SANDOVAL

THE Spanish chronicles speak of Guerrero and Aguilar as the only survivors of the castaways in Yucatan. But there was another — Pedro de Sandoval, a distant relative of that companion of Cortes whose name has become famous in the history of the Conquest of Mexico. Sandoval was one of those who had been captured by the tribe of Ahkin Xooc, and in the distribution of the captives he had fallen to the portion of the Indian who had first discovered the Spaniards. His fate was harder than that of those who had been allotted to the chief, for he was put to the most menial tasks and was scantily fed and poorly housed. But during his captivity of nearly two years he acquired a thorough knowledge of the language of the country. At last he fell ill of

a fever, and so miserable was his condition that when one morning he was no longer seen, it was said that, like the others who had perished from disease and hardship, he too was dead, and the mound was shown under which he had been buried.

The fact was, however, that Sandoval, seeing his comrades perishing around him, had resolved to take his chances in the forest rather than bear longer a hopeless captivity. An opportunity occurred one night, when his wrists had been insecurely fastened and the Indians about him were asleep. He stole forth from the village unobserved, taking nothing with him that he had not brought into the world, yet even thus, happy in his liberty.

The joy of youth had come to him with returning health (for the fever had passed away), and a free life, even with the deer and wild-cat, seemed better than the bondage from which he had fled.

Making himself a primitive bow from the saplings and tendrils of the forest, and fashioning rude arrows from the straight twigs and sharp stones in his path, he was able, with nuts and wild fruits and abundant game, to provide for the necessities of

nature. There were many dangers in such a life, but what was danger by the side of slavish misery? He wandered aimlessly from day to day, avoiding all pathways and all signs of human habitation. If he could have had a comrade in his wild life he would have been content!

One peril, however, greater than all others, more deadly than jaguar or reptile now beset him—the lack of water. At the time of his escape the rainy season was just over. The pools which he encountered in the forests became rarer and shallower, and at last they were wholly dry.

He wandered for days and found not a drop to quench his intolerable thirst. He killed a deer, and with mad eagerness drank its blood, leaving its flesh untasted. He tried to follow the tracks of the wild beasts on their way to water, but they crossed each other everywhere, and he would thread for hours a tangled labyrinth only to lose it in the end; for he was unskilled in tracing foot-prints in the wilderness.

At last, on one broiling day, while struggling, faint from thirst, through the dense undergrowth, he saw, a little way ahead of

him, what seemed a small opening in the woods. On reaching it, he found a great orifice, perhaps a hundred feet across and nearly circular in shape, which proved to be the mouth of a huge cavern, still larger in dimensions, that yawned beneath him. He leaned over the edge, and far below he saw plainly by the light of the vertical sun streaming into the abyss, a pool of clear, light-green water, in which fish were darting to and fro.

That sight was more maddening to him than the cup of Tantalus. His parched tongue was hanging from his mouth, his eyes were bursting from their sockets, his brain was whirling in flame, and yet there was a cool refuge from the heat—shelter, water, restoration—sparkling a hundred feet below him, seemingly as inaccessible as the wells of his native city across the sea ; for as he skirted the margin of the opening, he found that it was simply the top of an irregular dome, impossible to scale or to descend. On one side, indeed, vines, bespangled with bright tropical flowers crept over the mouth of the cavern and hung in matted masses down from the edge, but below their extreme reach the

gap was so great that he could not leap into the shining water, and if he did, how could he ever climb again those arching walls of rock? A living death would be the price of his short-lived enjoyment.

But his great need lent wings to his invention. The sight of the tendrils that hung from the opening gave him the thought that he might find others in the neighbourhood with which to reach the pool below. He saw many vines encircling the trees around him, but none long enough for his purpose. He began, however, to disentangle them, hoping that by connecting three or four, he might construct a natural rope for his descent. After some hours he had spliced several of these vines together in such a way that it seemed possible to reach the bottom. Winding one of them around the trunk of a tree that stood near, and throwing the others over the edge of the orifice, he saw the lower end of his rope trailing in the water below and frightening away the fishes that were swimming where it fell. But he had not been able to join the vines securely by the thin withes he had gathered for that purpose, and there was great danger

that the rope might break somewhere in his descent, or that its sections might fall apart after he had reached the bottom. Still his need was so great that he resolved to make the trial.

Swinging himself from the margin, he climbed down, hand over hand, and in a few minutes he felt the cool water about his ankles. Thereupon he let go his frail ladder and plunged into the pool.

What joy to swim in its liquid depths, to drink his fill from the clear waters, to lie in calm repose upon the broad ledge of rock around its border! He had no doubt, if his rope would but hold together, that he could climb again to the mouth of the cave. The vines were twisted and gnarled and would furnish in many places an excellent foothold where he could rest in his ascent.

So, wearied with his long efforts, he made a rough bed of some grass and weeds that grew on a scanty patch of earth close to the edge of the water, and fell into a long, deep slumber.

CHAPTER V

THE SENOTE

WHEN he awoke, it seemed as if evening were coming on, but he noticed that the shadows lay in the opposite direction from that toward which they had been creeping when he lay down beside the pool. It was plain then that he had outslept the night. He began now at leisure to inspect his surroundings. The dome above him was irregular and somewhat oblong. The bottom of the cave was perhaps two hundred yards long and more than half as wide, the pool in the middle occupying scarcely as much space as the shelving rocks around it. It was, however, of great depth, and although no stream could be seen flowing into it or out of it, there seemed to be a slight current coming from some source still deeper in the entrails

of the earth. The water was very clear, and its faint green colour was evidently due, not merely to the way in which the light through the opening above was reflected by the limestone walls, but also to some peculiar qualities of its own. The matted vines, sparkling with wild flowers, hung in rich festoons down from the orifice. A few palms and cacti leaned over the edge, and above these there were light clouds chasing each other swiftly across the deep blue of the sky. The rope by which he had descended was still dangling above the pool, swayed this way and that by a light breeze which seemed, he thought, to blow from one side of the cavern toward the opening above, for the leaves of the vines would sometimes curl upward as if pressed from below.

After another deep draught from the waters of the pool and another plunge into its cool depths, Sandoval prepared to ascend, for a sharp morning appetite, which there was no means of satisfying in the cavern, had followed his long slumber. But when he examined more narrowly his rope of vines, he made a dreadful discovery. The constant swaying had gradually uncoiled

and loosened the fastening of the nearest link of his precious chain, and it seemed as though the lowest section of the rope was soon to fall. Perhaps it would still bear his weight. He must act quickly if at all. Seizing the vine as it swung near the edge of the water, he began to climb with great activity, but before he reached the critical fastening, his worst fears were realised. The sections parted and he fell, sinking deep into the pool below.

Struggling to the surface, he sat down on the bank breathless and despairing, a prey to the gloomiest forebodings. His fate seemed even more terrible now than when he had stood in expectation of sacrifice, for then at least the last pang would soon have been over and there would have been companionship in suffering. But thus to die alone, to undergo the prolonged agony of starvation — the thought of it stifled and choked him. Perhaps he could fashion from the contents of the cavern some implement to catch those beautiful creatures which swam and sported in the lusty joy of life before his eyes. But where was the net, the hook, the bait wherewith to make them his prey? He walked again and

again around his prison searching everywhere, but there was no succour.

Then another hope toyed with his sufferings. Whence came that soft wind which blew toward the entrance of his prison house? There must be some other way to the outside world. He tracked the source of the breeze to a long cleft in the rocks on one side of the cave. But the cleft was not wider than the breadth of a hand — there was no egress there.

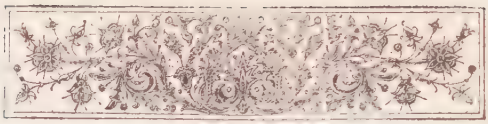
Suddenly he noticed on the ground a curving track, where the rock seemed smoother than elsewhere, as if it had been worn into a path, perhaps by men, perhaps by wild beasts upon their way to water. Here then was the hope of rescue. Let him follow the track and he might discover the door of his prison. He found indeed that the pathway led behind a rock so much like the walls of the cavern that the opening could not be seen until he was but a few steps away.

Without knowing what was before him, he plunged into the darkness. Emerging from a narrow passage, he walked upon a still narrower ledge at the side of a deep chasm. On his left was a jagged wall and

on his right he could hear the gurgling of water far below him. Anywhere upon the way a panther might meet him, or some human being more pitiless than the beasts of the forest. Yet what were such dangers by the side of the terrible fate from which he fled?

He made his way cautiously, yet swiftly, feeling with his feet for the smooth path in the rock which was always distinguishable from the rougher surface on either side. He had not gone far, however, when he seemed to hear the confused sound of voices, and then there appeared in the distance the glimmer of a flickering light. Involuntarily he turned back and in a few moments had again reached the open cavern.

Here he began to look hurriedly for some place of concealment; there was none save at the farther end close to the limestone wall; there a little promontory of rock some two feet high projected into the pool and offered shelter. The water was quite deep at that point, and if he kept his body submerged the small jutting ledge would hide his face. He betook himself at once to this place of refuge and there waited.



CHAPTER VI

THE WATER CARRIERS

THE confused murmur of voices was heard again ; then it broke forth into a low song.

But music, which everywhere else upon God's footstool brings comfort and delight to him who hears it, was laden with stern forebodings to the castaway. For music was the prelude to those horrible religious rites in which his own part was the doom of sacrifice. It seemed to him, however, that these voices were softer than the harsh tones of the priests at the dreadful orgies he once had witnessed, and peering through a crack in the limestone, he saw, entering the cavern at the opposite side, a file of Indian maidens, each with a water jar upon her shoulder — all but one, for the damsel who led them, more richly apparelled than the rest, was free from any burden.

The others were arrayed in the clothing common to the unmarried women of the higher classes — short white skirts embroidered at the lower edge, and loose sleeveless tunics covering the waist. Their heavy black hair was combed in tresses ; a part of it was wound around their heads and decorated with flowers and small bright feathers, while another part hung in long braids down their backs. They carried their jars to the pool, they splashed their feet in the clear water, they filled the vessels and set them close to the margin ; then they sat down upon the flat rock to talk. They had also brought with them fruit and cakes of corn which they distributed and began to eat.

It was clear now that this pool was one of the "senotes" which furnished to some city in the neighbourhood a part at least of its supply of drinking water, and that these girls had come to perform their morning task of fetching the water to their homes.

They all talked at once and so confused was the chatter that Sandoval could understand but little of what they said. But he noticed that they addressed their remarks chiefly to the tallest of their number, the

maiden who had first entered the cavern, and that there was something said about a coming marriage festival. There was much laughter in their girlish prattle, but he observed that the maiden to whom they talked listened gravely and spoke but little.

They had not finished their repast when one of them produced from the folds of her dress a trinket, a grotesque figure curiously moulded in clay, which she showed to the tall damsel who sat in their midst. Another maiden, sitting near, tried to seize the trinket, and the first sprang quickly to her feet and shot off like an arrow, pursued by her companion, while the rest watched them with much laughter and many exclamations.

They flew around the margin of the pool and were coming dangerously near the place where Sandoval was hidden. The second girl rapidly overtook the fugitive, who at last plunged into the water to save her treasure. From this point she perceived, just in front of her, the bearded face of the stranger.

"A god! Some dreadful god!" she screamed, and recoiling in terror, she climbed back to the rocks, and ran head-

long to the entrance of the cave; then seizing one of the lighted fagots left there when the maidens entered the arched chamber, she vanished. The others were close upon her heels, and soon the great dome was empty. All had disappeared.

No, not all — Sandoval perceived that one had remained; the tall maiden, the mistress of the band, had risen to her feet and was looking quietly and gravely toward the corner of the cavern from which had come the startling apparition.

To thee, O reader, who hast been trained in the worship of a God of love, the cry of terror at the sight of a deity may seem strange and unnatural. But many of the Maya gods were of a sterner race; they were solemn avengers — pitiless tyrants; they thirsted for man's blood — they were hungry for human flesh; they inflicted all the sufferings of earth — they presided over the torments of hell. To confront their superhuman power needed more courage than to meet the foe in battle.

Yet the Maya girl was undaunted. Why should she fear the gods? She had not harmed them. She had laid constantly upon their altars her offerings of fruits and

flowers. Nay, why should she fear anything? For she was the daughter of the king. So she waited until the strange god should appear.

Concealment was no longer possible. Sandoval came out from his hiding-place. He swam across the pool, and emerged partially from the water in front of the maiden, holding out his hand in supplication.

"Come forth," she said, and he rose and stood before her.

Reader, I blush to tell thee how he looked. For he was quite devoid of those ornaments with which young men are wont to bedeck themselves when they first appear before ladies of beauty and rank. He had naturally made no preparation for this unexpected meeting. He had not even a girdle of leaves, and he could not, like Ulysses, snatch a bough from some tree near by ere he should supplicate his Nausicaa, for there was no tree at hand. He could show his modesty by nothing but a blush, and to the credit of his Christian breeding be it said, that among the mingled emotions that possessed him, shame was uppermost, and he blushed to the roots of his hair.

THE MEETING OF MAYA AND SANDOVAL

His unclad condition was not, however, in the maiden's thought. To those who live where, with the men at least, clothing is rather an ornament than a necessity, it is not to be expected that its absence should call for special observation.

But he who stood before her was indeed a strange being, such as she had never seen. His fair hair, waving above a broad forehead, his ruddy face, his light skin, browned indeed by exposure to the sun, but quite unlike that of her own people, and strangest of all his full curling beard and his blue eyes — all these things made him appear to her as no mere man, but as a being of quite another kind. Perhaps the blush which overspread his countenance was a mark of his anger that she had dared thus to confront a deity.

But if he was a god, where was the plumage which the gods always wore? What was the meaning of the unhealed wounds, of marks that looked like the scars of a lash, why the traces of the thorns and insects which had tormented him? Could the gods be thus defiled? A bow he had indeed — this he had kept constantly slung over his shoulder with a

few arrows, for it was his one means of procuring food during his sojourn in the wilderness — but such a bow! It was merely a rough sapling fastened by long tendrils. Her own maidens could make a better one. Would a god hunt with such an implement?

CHAPTER VII

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

WHILE the heart of the girl was filled with wonder at the form and face of him who stood before her, the eyes of the wanderer rested upon a vision which was never to pass away from the recollections of his life. Her long black tresses were bound around a shapely head and combed over a brow, not broad indeed, but high and thoughtful. Of her face all that he saw were two great luminous eyes, "dark as the night, yet shining like the stars," which gazed on him with calm, unconscious fearlessness. She was tall indeed when gauged by the standard of her people, yet only of middle stature if measured by our own. Her complexion, though darker than that of the Caucasian, was very light when compared with the

swarthy colour of the men of her race. Her form was slender, of perfect grace and symmetry, and in the loose garments which hung about her in full folds she would have been no unworthy model for a sculptor's chisel. Her skirt, folded around her waist, fell to her ankles. At the lower edge it was delicately embroidered in small geometric forms, while a short tunic, falling to her knees, was decorated in the same manner, both around the bottom and about her neck and arms, which were left bare. Over her shoulders hung a mantle of many colours, which served as a light shawl in the daytime and as a covering while she slept at night. There were bracelets of gold upon her wrists and ankles, and around her throat a necklace studded with opals, whose changing hues glowed like the clouds of sunset. Sandals of deerskin wrought with iridescent feather-work covered her tiny feet.

Sandoval did not of course examine these details with critical eye; he only saw the rich beauty of the girl and of her garments and her stately presence, for she stood before him, one foot slightly advanced, not

haughty but erect, looking in her virgin majesty the queen she was, but still a queen unconscious of her royalty.

Meanwhile she gazed upon the wanderer, not quite able to guess from his strange appearance whether he were god, man, or devil. In her doubt she chose the plainest and directest way to knowledge, — she asked him.

"Art thou the god of this senote or of the stream that feeds it? Who art thou?"

The answer came in choking accents, so broken that she could hardly understand them:

"No god — only a man — poor, hungry, with no friends—a stranger. Pity me!"

And he sank upon his knees, and picking from the ground a morsel of earth, he brought it to his heart in token of submission, after the manner of the men of her own race.

Then a change came slowly over her countenance. The look of dignity with which she had dared to meet even the frown of a deity was gone, and in its place a smile of compassion stole over her features.

Bending, she raised our hero from the

ground, led him to a low ledge of rock and bade him sit, while (since real pity is always practical) she gathered the remnants of the breakfast which had been left by her companions in their flight and set them on the rock beside him. And she did all this (strange conquest of a passion that wells unquenchably in woman's breast) without asking him a single question! But when he had eaten the repast she sat beside him, and looking full into his face (for she was unlike the maidens of her race who cast their eyes upon the ground when they address a stranger), she asked:

"Of what country art thou? Why hast thou come to a land where thou hast no friends? What has befallen thee?"

"My country," he answered, "is far across the sea where the sun rises. I came with many comrades in a boat with wings borne by the wind. For three moons we journeyed, till we reached an island where there are towns built by my people. Here we tarried for a time, and then set forth again sailing toward the noonday over the bright waters, until we came to a new land where there was much toil and suffering.

At last our chief sent me with others back to the island to bring him succour, but on the way a cruel storm drove us upon your shores. Five of my companions were sacrificed, the rest fled. We were seized again and held in hard captivity. Others perished, but I escaped and wandered through the forest. Thirsting unto death, I climbed down to this cave. There are the broken vines by which I reached it. Thou knowest the rest; behold me here, thy slave." And he sank to the ground and kissed the hem of her garment.

"I will help thee," she said in a quiet voice. "Come with me."

And taking his hand she led him forth through the narrow entrance. The torches had been carried off by the maidens in their flight, so the two groped their way together through the darkness. She knew the path, but they crept cautiously, for there were sharp precipices and deep gulfs and rocky steps, and at one place they crossed a bridge of logs over a narrow gorge. At last a faint line of light greeted their eyes and they came forth into a broad chamber with a low doorway leading to the upper world.

At the side of this entrance there was a

deep recess where one might well be hidden from observation.

"Rest here," she said, and taking the mantle from her shoulders she wrapped it around him; then adding, "I will soon come back to thee," she disappeared through the thick palmettos and lofty cacti which bordered the winding path outside the entrance of the cave.

CHAPTER VIII

MEDITATION

THE grove through which she returned to the king's palace lay in a valley between two low ranges of hills. The rainy season was just over and the foliage was still green ; above the dense growth of copse and thicket arose multitudes of graceful palms ; the majestic ceiba, with its huge trunk covered with bark like an elephant's skin, spread its innumerable branches high and wide, while great numbers of air-plants, countless wild flowers, a labyrinth of interlacing vines, great cacti of many varieties and vast dimensions —some taller than the trees themselves— added to the confusion and oppressive luxuriance of the jungle.

The princess walked slowly along the winding path, deeply absorbed in thought. She had promised to succour the stranger

and this she would do at whatever sacrifice. But how? She might keep him for a time in the depths of the senote, but he could not stay there forever. If she went to him alone her absence would be noted and must be explained. Besides, how could the king's daughter bear food to him with her own hands? And what servant or companion could she trust with her secret? But if he came forth from the cavern and the men of the city should find him, his fate would be certain death; for the king, her father, was diligent and punctual in fulfilling his obligations to the gods. She shuddered with fear at the thought of such a doom.

What then was there in this poor wanderer that should fill her heart with painful apprehensions? What was it that brought to her mind as never before the horrors of human sacrifice, with the blue eyes of one victim looking helplessly to her for succour? What magic was it which poured into an ear that had never hearkened to suggestions of craft or cunning, the poisoned counsel to save him even by deceit? Nay, she did not harbour a doubt whether the end would justify the means, but forthwith devised a most Jesuitical plan for his salvation.

The fact that the stranger had been taken for a god gave her the clew. She would keep him in the cave till he was sound and strong, bringing to him all he might need in order to come before her people in the likeness of a god. Then he should seek her hand in marriage, and she would be the bride of the new deity. After that what harm could befall him?

Yet what of Canek, the lord of Peten-Itza? What of that powerful alliance between the tribes — her father's cherished hope? She put the thought from her, yet it returned with steady persistence.

CHAPTER IX

HISTORY

WE must now go back a little in our story to the early life of the princess and the history of her people.

The traditions of Yucatan tell us of various migrations into the peninsula. The first of these —*Cenial* or "the little descent" they called it—was from the east across the water, perhaps from Cuba or some neighbouring island, and the legend is that as the people came, their god opened for them twelve pathways through the sea. A long time afterwards there followed another migration from the south-west; *Nohenial*, "the great descent," it was called.

The first hero-king was Zamnà, the civiliser, high-priest, and lawgiver, who brought in the hieratic writing and taught the people the art of medicine. Like Adam he gave

names to the things around him — not indeed to beasts and birds, but to the bays, the straits, the capes, the senotes, and the towns. He was the leader of the Itzas and he laid the foundations of Itzamal, where even to-day his colossal face may be seen moulded in stucco at the side of a lofty pyramid. He also established the city of Chichen-Itza. The religion he taught was simple and gracious. The sun and stars were objects of adoration and human sacrifices were unknown. After he died he was worshipped as a deity — like great men everywhere among rude peoples.

Long afterwards there came from the west another hero, Kukulcan, "the feathered serpent." He came bare-headed with nineteen bearded followers, and led a life of marvellous purity. First he ruled over Chichen-Itza till the nobles called him to the throne of the kingdom and invited him to Mayapan,* "the Maya Banner," which now became the capital of the land. Kukulcan moved thither and reigned prosperously for ten years, at the end of which

* A city so called from the national standard of richly wrought feather-work which was kept there, the city thus becoming the rallying point of the entire confederacy.

he gave up the crown and taking the road to the coast, followed by a few disciples, he embarked and nothing more was ever heard of him. Then he too took his place among the gods.

These were the heroic days of the race, so far back among the mists of time that no man can say how much of the legend is historic and how much is mythological.

The people chose his successor from the family of the Cocomes, great lords of Yucatan, who thus established an illustrious dynasty.*

A native document, thought to be reliable, tells us that in one of the earlier centuries of the Christian era there was still another migration from the south, led by the Tutul Xius, a race of warlike kings who, after many wanderings, established their capital not far from Mayapan and

*The seven sovereigns who successively reigned after him continued to give the country an excellent government, and tradition tells of the blessings which they conferred upon their subjects and the monuments which they built — the fountains, reservoirs, baths, roads, palaces, temples, schools, hospitals for the old and infirm, retreats for widows and orphans, halting places for travellers — such were the titles of the Cocomes to public gratitude.

near the southern slope of a low sierra, that stretched across the peninsula from east to west. This city they called Uxmal, and they embellished it with stately palaces and temples.

For a long time there was a triple confederacy among the lords of Mayapan, Uxmal, and Chichen-Itza, in which the leadership was accorded to Mayapan. But at last the Cocome kings became proud and oppressive*; serious dissensions arose

*First of the tyrants was Ahtubtun, "spitter of precious stones," who wrung harsh tribute from the people and squandered it in luxuries and in gifts to favourites. Then followed Aban, who added to his name the august title of Kinehahau, "Child of the Sun." Aban moved with his court to Kimpech (now Campeche) upon the seaboard, and put himself in communication with the princes of Xicalanca, in Mexico, asking them to furnish him with armed troops, so that he could silence the murmurs of his people. They made haste to serve the Ahtepal (or king) by sending him several "Xiquipils" or legions, each of eight thousand men, well armed and disciplined. These men belonged to the Nahuatl race, who were accustomed to human sacrifices, and their abominable rites soon spread through the peninsula.

The king put to death many nobles of high rank and punished others by reducing them to slavery. This was the first time that a Maya prince had dared to strike at the liberty of his subjects, who had never known slavery

within the capital, and the lords of Uxmal now saw that the moment had come to

before, and who considered it more dreadful than death. The people lost their affection for the Cocomes and turned their eyes upon the neighbouring Tutul Xius. These princes had always been mindful of the welfare of their subjects, and they now won the love of the people of Mayapan, for when Aban, with his foreign troops, had begun to reduce his vassals to slavery, the kings of Chichen and Uxmal remonstrated and prevented the Ahtepal from pursuing upon their own domains the Mayas who had there sought a refuge against his tyranny.

At last Aban died, but the complaints were renewed against his successor, Hunac Ceel, who fell into the same excesses. He brought in new troops from Xicalanca ; he punished with rigour all whom he suspected of complaining, and he gave his subjects no other choice than revolt or abject servitude.

He convoked an assembly of the higher vassals of the crown, and obtained from this tribunal a decree for the deposition of the lord of Chichen-Itza, a thing unheard of up to that time.

Ulmil, the successor of the deposed prince, resolved upon vengeance, and Hunac Ceel at last gave him his opportunity. He loaded his subjects with new taxes; the foreign soldiers became the masters of the country; the Maya lords were excluded from all places and thought themselves happy if they did not fall victims to the plots of the tyrant. At last they sought the aid of the kings of Chichen-Itza and Uxmal, imploring deliverance, and the dynasty of the Cocomes was overthrown.

UXMAL. THE NUNNERY. EAST FAÇADE, WITH HOUSE OF THE DIVINER BEYOND

(*See page 155*)

seize the sceptre of the kingdom. After a bloody battle Mayapan was taken, the king and the royal household were put to death, and a Tutul Xiu was, by the choice of the nobility, confirmed in the title of supreme monarch.*

During a long period which followed, he and his successors dwelt in Uxmal in more than regal state. But after an era of prosperity, a usurper, Ahcunal, obtained pos-

* The monarch of Uxmal now devoted himself to uprooting the abuses of the last Cocomes; he restored the exiles to their homes; he set free the greater part of those who had been reduced to bondage; he attempted to abolish slavery altogether, but it had taken such root in the land that his efforts were ineffectual; he protected the foreign mercenaries who had escaped the massacre of Mayapan, and assigned to them a province south of the mountains of Mani. These generous acts strengthened the throne of Uxmal.

But among the children of the last of the Cocomes there was one who by his absence from the city had escaped the massacre. The new king ("The Face of Fire" as he was called) was too magnanimous to visit upon this prince the crimes of his ancestors. He not only suffered him to live, he also gave him as an appanage the province of Zotuta. But in thus perpetuating the family of the Cocomes, the Tutul Xius nourished in the heart of their kingdom the hatred of a fallen race, and the lords of Zotuta afterwards became the mortal enemies of the dynasty.

session of the throne. Great disorders followed, and when he was overthrown and the Tutul Xius were again restored to power, the people of the city determined to abandon their own capital and to betake themselves to Mayapan. They accordingly migrated thither, and the monarchs reigned for a time in great splendour at the ancient capital.

But it was not long until various factions again began to contend furiously with one another. Ah Xiu, the reigning sovereign (grandfather of the king who dwelt in Mani at the time of our story), became the victim of a plot among his vassal lords. He was driven from Mayapan and pursued from one province to another; the rebel chiefs gave to the flames the great city which had been the centre of his dominion and the scene of their own vassalage, and the kingdom was divided into little principalities whose mutual hates and jealousies accomplished the ruin of the Maya race.

The downfall of the kingdom took place about the middle of the fifteenth century. It was followed by a series of disasters. One winter night there was a terrible hurricane which swept away the forests and the

crops and killed great multitudes of human beings. Then, after fifteen prosperous years, there was a pestilence, the *Oena Kuchil* or "Sudden Death," so dreadful that birds of prey came into the houses and devoured the corpses which lay unburied. Then there were sixteen years of war among the tribes, and it is said that in one great battle between the contending factions there perished a hundred and fifty thousand men.

In one of the provinces, however, a new city had been built by those who remained faithful to the king. They named it Mani, "It is past," for the old empire had departed and the threads of life had to be taken up anew. Here a palace and temple had been erected for the exiled sovereign and a faint echo of the solemn worship and imperial magnificence of Uxmal and Mayapan was still preserved. The successor of Ah Xiu reigned over Mani for more than forty years, and now Ahpula, his only male descendant, had been for ten years upon the throne.

Ahpula had no son to be the heir of the kingdom. One boy had been born to him, but the child had not outlived his nursing, and although the king had made many sac-

rifices and prayers to Ixchel, yet his daughter Maya was now the only living offspring of his union with the wisest and best of queens. Often indeed Ahpula had been urged to put away a consort so unfruitful, but he would not part from her, for she had been the love of his youth. Should Maya have a son, however, that son might inherit the throne. Hence came the offer of Canek, the lord of Peten-Itza, who ruled in the island city of Tayasal.* He was a prince, crafty

* The story of the origin of this city is lit by the flame of romance. Another Canek, first of the name, had been one of the lords of Chichen-Itza. He was enamoured of a noble maiden, Lila, "the dewdrop," and she returned his love, but her hand had been promised by her father to Chanbel, another lord, for whom she cared not, and the day had been set for the wedding. The evening before the festival, when Lila was walking in the garden in front of her father's palace, and bemoaning the fate which was to part her from the man she loved, suddenly, at the foot of the terrace, she saw the face of Canek, who came forth for a moment from the thick copse to tell her that on the morrow he would come and save her. And sure enough in the midst of the festival, while the garlands were twined around the stone pillars of the temple and music resounded and the tables were spread for the banquet, a great cry arose and Canek and his warriors entered and seized the maiden to bear her away. Great was the tumult, for Chanbel and his friends fought desperately, but Canek had his will and Lila became his

and warlike, who had often led wild forays against the men of the north and returned with fat spoils from many a battle. Twice had he wedded, but each time his wife had died without offspring, and there was no heir to his dominions. Then it was that he sought the hand of the daughter of the Tutul Xius. As the husband of Maya he would become the father of a royal line as well as ruler for life upon the death of the present sovereign. Such a prospect made it well worth his while to acknowledge Ahpula as his lord. So the marriage of Maya to Canek was deemed by all except the princess herself a most desirable event.

But the choice of a husband which the king had made for her was little to the liking of his daughter. The lord of Peten-Itza, it was said, was old and ugly, and among the people of Mani, with whom he had often been at war, he had the reputation of great cruelty.

"How much better would it be," thought Maya, "to become the bride of the fair stranger!"

wife. Then Chanbel collected the warriors of his tribe and there was a long strife between the rivals until Canek retreated and journeyed southward till he came to a great lake and established Tayasal, a new city on the island of Peten-Itza, where he dwelt in safety with his bride.

CHAPTER X

MAYA'S SCHEME

SINCE the royal line was to descend through her, Maya had been taught many things which were commonly withheld from the women of her race. Moreover she had filled the office of "Ixnacan Katun," or chief of the vestals of the Sun, whose duty it was to keep alive the sacred fire in the temple of that deity, as well as to take part in other religious ceremonies—to make sacrifices of fruits and flowers to Ixchel, the goddess of healing, to Ixchebelyax, the goddess of painting and embroidery, and even to the great Ixazalvoh, mother of the gods, who had taught womankind the art of weaving.

This sacred sisterhood had been established in early days by a princess of Uxmal, and no one who was not of royal blood

could be its chief. The honour was a very great one, and the rank was considered equal to the higher orders of priesthood. Indeed Zahuy Kak, the first chief of the vestals, had become so eminent for her virtues that after her death her name was written among those of the gods.

Maya had been carefully trained for her sacred dignity by the high-priest, her uncle, and she had been taught the use of the hieratic characters, the symbolic writing introduced by Zamnà, in which were written the ancient manuscripts that recorded the history of her race.

The princess was deeply beloved, not only by her kindred and the vestals and maidens of her train, but by the people of Mani, who called her "The Morning Sunbeam," and invoked the blessings of the gods upon her beautiful face as she passed among them. For she resolutely refused to dwell in the seclusion of the palace, and often when she learned of sickness or sorrow in the city, she went forth with her maidens (despite the remonstrances of the queen-mother and once even against the command of the king himself) to bring to the sufferers what relief she could, together

with words of kindness such as might have fallen from paradise. Even the birds in the palace gardens seemed to love her, for they fluttered around her as she walked, perching upon her shoulders while they were fed from her hand.

Such was the girl of sixteen summers whom her father had named after the race which his ancestors ruled during many generations, "for in her," he said, "is the hope of my people." And this was the maiden who for the first time in her life was now secretly nursing a scheme of guile so daring that it might well wreck the future of the kingdom, all for the sake of one forlorn wanderer whom she pitied — and loved.

To Maya's eager fancy, the plan which she had devised for the rescue of the fair-haired stranger did not seem difficult. Having been taught the history and mythology of her race, she knew that the gods had often appeared among her people. The great Zamnà had given them their laws and taught them the arts of medicine, writing, and astronomy. Kukulkan had come among them, changing his serpent form to that of a man, while he reigned over them as a mighty king. Moreover, had not the

books of Chilan-Balam,* containing the prophecies of their greatest seers, already foretold that a god should come from the East, across the waters? For many years they had been waiting for him. She remembered the very words of the prophecy as she had learned them by heart.

"The signal of God will appear on the heights and the cross with which the world was enlightened will be shown. . . . Receive your bearded guests from the East, who bring the signal of the God that comes to us in mercy and pity."

These words seemed to her to fit the case. It is true she could produce only *one* bearded stranger from the East, and that one was to be the god himself, yet this was near enough. When men are looking for the accomplishment of a prophecy there

* Chilan-Balam was for a long time considered to be the name of a particular prophet. Dr. Brinton has shown, however, that it is a generic name, that the books of Chilan-Balam are books of prophecy containing also dissertations on astrology, chronology, and medicine. These books are specially distinguished by the name of the village or city in which they were composed. The word *Chilan* in the Maya tongue means mouth-piece, and the word *Balam*, originally "tiger," is applied to a certain class of priests.

is no need of a very literal fulfilment to satisfy them. The god was here, the maiden who had seen him behind the rock would know him, and Maya herself would bring him forth from his hiding-place.

Thou wilt ask, reader, why she did not fear the other gods, who, knowing the deceit, would surely avenge their outraged dignity and inflict some terrible punishment on the maid who thus imposed a counterfeit upon their worshippers. But need I explain to one who knows that love is blind, that she fancied they would look with pity on such a charitable fraud—nay it might be they would not even learn of her wickedness? The gods know very much—but surely not all things—unless men tell them! Besides, she was the king's daughter and what would they do to her? Moreover, she held forth a handful of maize to Zahuy Kak "The Fire Maiden" and asked whether to save a life she might not tell this little harmless lie? And when she counted the grains of maize lo, the number was even! The goddess had consented! She was safe! So she dreamed, poor child, and foresaw not the dark plots that gods and men would soon be weaving for her ruin.

CHAPTER XI

MAYA AND HER MAIDENS

WHEN we last saw our heroine she was still upon the pathway between the senote and the king's palace. She now entered the enclosure of the royal gardens which were on the slope of a hill at some distance from the town. There were birds of brilliant plumage in the trees, and deer sprang up at her approach and gathered about her, seeking food at her hands.

In the midst of the garden was an artificial lake or *aguada*, paved with stones securely cemented at the bottom and filled during the rainy season by means of sluices dug around the sides of the hill. This reservoir supplied the animals on the royal domain and provided irrigation during the time of drouth. Its water was unwhole-

some and unfit to drink, however, and hence the senote from which Maya had just come had been set apart for the use of the king's household. It was to fetch the day's supply that the maidens (who, although of noble blood, were proud to call themselves servants of the king's daughter) had gone forth in the morning with their jars. In terror and amazement they had returned and were waiting in trembling anxiety near the *aguada*. They dared not enter the palace with the news that they had fled and left their mistress in the cave alone, and it was with unspeakable delight that they saw her emerging from the wood.

"Thanks be to Ixchel, thou art safe and well. How didst thou escape?"

"Was he indeed a god? Didst thou speak with him?"

"Did he harm thee? What did he say?"

"Yes," she answered, "he is a god, and though he harmed me not, it was well that you fled, for you are so timid that his look might have stricken you with blindness. But he promised me that if I would come again to worship him he would grant us many blessings — plentiful rain, crops, bees, and game, nay, children too, when

husbands claim our hands. He was the fairest of the gods, and kind and gentle. And when I said that I would come to him again with flowers and birds for sacrifice, he smiled on me, and then before my eyes he rose from the deep pool and floated away in the thin air through the cave's mouth up to the clouds of heaven. When next I meet him you must go with me and we will bring him all a god may need — food and flowers and bright raiment. But you must stay outside the cavern and I must meet him always alone, until he shall bid me bring you. Tell no one what you have seen, for bitter will be your punishment should my father know that you forsook me."

So she spoke, and they willingly consented, for they loved her — and they feared the punishment.

Then Maya bade them return with her at once to the senote for the water jars which they had left in their flight. Since she had assured them that the god was no longer there, they ventured to enter the cavern, though they besought her to stay close beside them for their fear was very great.

Reaching the pool, they refilled the vessels with fresh water.

When they had come forth once more into the grove, they observed that their mistress remained behind, so they set down their jars and waited for her.

It was some time before she appeared. She had paused at the entrance of the cave to speak again to the stranger and tell him of her plan. She found him hidden in the dark recess where she had left him.

"My maidens," she said, "took thee for a god, and indeed a god with bright locks and blue eyes like thine has long been looked for by my people. So I will bring thee fresh apparel, bright plumes, and broidered robes. My maidens shall prepare them for thee, for they are skilled in fashioning garments. They will not betray thee, for they fear that my father will punish them for leaving me by the pool alone. Nor do they know thy hiding-place. I told them thou hadst risen to the clouds and wouldst not return until this evening when I would come and offer thee food and flowers for sacrifice. This evening, therefore, I will visit thee again and they shall stay outside, and I will bring thee cakes and wine and deer's meat. And when thy wounds are healed and thou art fair again,

then will I clothe thee in a beautiful robe, and lead thee to the palace of my father (for he is king of Mani) and thou shalt be our god."

So she told him all—all but one thing, and how could she tell him that? Surely he ought to guess it.

Yet he spoke not. He kneeled and kissed the hem of her robe — and thus she left him.

Why had he not spoken? Did he love her? She had seen the tears in his imploring eyes when they met under the dome of the senote, but these might be tears of despair and suffering. She could not tell and the doubt troubled her. So her brow was clouded and her face was sad when she rejoined her companions.

Although they yearned to know why she had lingered behind, yet they saw from her countenance that it was not best to ask, and they walked on in silence to the palace. Here they found that there had been great wonderment at their long absence and that some were about to go in quest of them. They explained their delay by saying that they had not noticed, while they talked together in the depths

of the senote, how high the sun had risen in the sky. They were met with a reproof by the queen-mother at the foolishness of girls who spent the hours in chatter and idleness, and when they were put to their daily tasks of spinning, weaving, and embroidery they were admonished to make up for lost time by greater diligence.

CHAPTER XII

DREAMS AND DEVICES.

THE princess attended her mother alone to the queen's chamber, where she was told that on the night before, the high-priest had gone to the divining house on the summit of the teocallis and had there counted from the signs of heaven the day of the approaching festival to Chaac, the giant god of the cornfield, and to Zamnà, the founder of the race. Upon the occasion of this festival, the lord of Peten-Itza was to come and claim her for his wife. That was still three months away, but the Maya month was only twenty days, and the time was short enough for the needful preparation. The queen spoke with her daughter of the wedding — of the new robes and jewels and the damsels who should attend the bride — of all the things

that at such a time are most precious to woman's heart,—and the mother noticed that she had never before seen her child so compliant. Maya appeared to have few opinions of her own upon these weighty matters, but yielded without comment to every suggestion. Often indeed her mind seemed far away. She was thinking perhaps of the lord to whom she was betrothed, and of the new power and splendour which this union was to bring to her father's house. For ever since her childhood she had been devoted to the memory of the great line of kings from whom she was descended. How small was her father's dignity to-day beside the glory of the past! He was the ruler of only a single province, and though the city of Mani was of considerable size, how pitiful it seemed by the side of the great Mayapan, and how small his palace of a score of chambers when compared with the stately dwellings of Uxmal! There a whole city had stood within the sacred enclosure in the midst of the larger town and was devoted to the service of the king and his vassal lords and priests!

Mani had always been considered little

more than a temporary sojourn for the royal exile. But Mayapan was wholly destroyed, and though Uxmal, the earlier capital, which had been abandoned long before, was still in a tolerable state of preservation, yet there were few who dwelt there, and the country round about had become a wilderness.

Many there were who thought, however, that when the kingdom was re-established the people should betake themselves to Uxmal, where the great palaces and temples remained, and, restoring these edifices to their early splendour, rebuild around them the city which had fallen into decay.

So the queen-mother, after she had spoken of the preparations for the wedding, and had given certain instructions to her attendants, fell to talking with her daughter of the re-establishment of the empire. If Peten-Itza joined their cause, the other chiefs would soon be brought into subjection, and the Tutal Xius would reign again in all their ancient power.

She was surprised that her daughter, who had always shown great zeal upon this subject, now listened without a word and gave not even an answering smile while

the mother held before her eyes these dreams of glory.

When she was alone, Maya began to realise that her plan would be harder to accomplish than she had at first supposed. The lord of Peten-Itza would soon come, and his rage and disappointment at the rejection of his suit would surely be very great. Her father was a reverent worshipper of the gods, but could she persuade him that this strange being was indeed a deity for whom he must forsake the most cherished project of his life?

Moreover, the stranger had not asked her to become his bride—had not even spoken to her of love. How then could she unfold to him this most necessary part of her plan? For she well knew that unless he became her husband he could not long keep his position as a deity. He knew nothing of the supernatural duties that would be required of him. She must be his spokesman and priestess, and he would be safe only while she was at his side.

She would tell him this when next she saw him. Then he would surely understand and ask her hand.

That evening she and her maidens went

again to the senote, for she had craftily emptied some of the water jars, and no one could understand why the day's supply had fallen so short of the day's needs. Yet more water was necessary, and she and her maidens offered to fetch it.

They took with them fruit and game for a repast, and gathered flowers upon their way to the cavern, but when they reached the entrance, Maya, leaving the others outside, said to them :

"Rest here ; I will bring my offerings to the god alone, and when he has departed I will come back to you, and then we will go together and fill the jars."

So she entered the cave.

"I have brought thee food," she said, when the Spaniard stood before her, "and in a few days I will bring thee raiment, and soon thou shalt come with me to the palace. I will tell thee all thou must do, but be sure and stay always at my side, for I must speak for thee, otherwise they will ask thee things thou canst not answer.

"When they question thee, speak always to me in thine own tongue, for though I do not understand it, I will say that it is the language of the gods, which

thou hast taught me, and I will interpret for thee in such a way that all shall be content. I will be thy priestess and seer, for I am skilled in the learning of my people and know all the secrets of our religion. It will not be safe for thee to be alone ; we must always be together, lest they discover who thou art."

"Now," thought the maiden, "he will surely speak."

But he merely answered, "Whatever thou bid'st me I will do" ; and although they talked long together and he spoke much of gratitude, he uttered not one word of love; so with a heavy heart she returned to her companions and they all went to the pool and filled their jars.

And why indeed had he not spoken? Her face had seemed to him the fairest he had ever seen, and the pity in her great dark eyes had filled his heart with unutterable love. But had she not told him she was the daughter of the king? How should a forlorn wanderer dare aspire to such a pinnacle of glory?

Reader, no doubt if thou or I were in his place and were to behold such eyes and worship them, we should not hesitate to

speak ; for we would know from what we have seen in this strange world that the aspirations of unspoken love, though never safe, are never hopeless ; that none may descend to the lowliest station and feel sure that his passion will awaken a responsive throb, nor need he deem that the loftiest heights are inaccessible. Be she milkmaid or be she queen, the lover cannot know his fate until her lips or eyes have spoken it. For love is like a bird, whose wings will dip sometimes into the lowliest valleys, though they may soar unwavering to the sun.

But the poor exile was young and inexperienced. He did not understand the caprices of the goddess.

Moreover, Maya had told him that she was the chief of a sacred sisterhood, and though she seemed very young to be an abbess, yet this would forever bar the pathway to love. For Sandoval did not know that by the Maya laws marriage was permitted to the sisters of the temple.

So his heart was filled with despair, and he was silent.

CHAPTER XIII

PREPARATIONS

ON their way homeward Maya told her maidens a beautiful fairy-story of the new god, weaving together fact and fancy in a strange bright chaos. He had floated, she said, down through the dome of the senote and had walked across the water to meet her and receive her offerings. His name indeed was one she had never heard before, and his home was near the sunrise far across the sea. There he had built great palaces of clouds and had reclined, when he was weary, within their shining chambers. Then, scattering them at will, he had leaped invisibly to earth and had walked among the people to learn of their joys and sufferings ; he had sent them rain and sunshine according to their needs ; he had destroyed the wicked and brought

happiness to the just ; he had laboured long until the people of that land had grown wise and merciful. They were like him, with beards, fair skin, blue eyes, and waving hair.

Then, when the land smiled with happiness and peace, he had bethought him of other regions where there was hunger and suffering and where the tribes strove with one another in battle. So he had resolved to visit these strange lands and bring to them also joy and prosperity. And he had made a great canoe with wings, that sped across the waters, and had guided its course over the bounding waves. Sometimes he would rise to heaven like a gull, but he could see nothing save the vast blue sea. Then changing his form he would plunge beneath the waves and swim and play with the fishes and serpents of the deep ; then betaking himself to his canoe he would spread its wings still westward toward the sunset.

Thus he had journeyed for many moons until he spied at last the shores of the Maya land, and wandering through the forest, saw the ruin wrought by the sad wars which had swept over the peninsula. To

bring the tribes together as of old in one strong bond, he had now sought the king. Yet it seemed best to speak first with the king's daughter ; for he knew that often it is the heart of a woman that opens most readily to the call for reconciliation.

His plan was this : He would dwell with them as their counsellor ; he would still the wrath of their enemies ; he would unite the tribes ; the king should reign in peace over the land, and Uxmal, their ancient capital, should be their dwelling-place.

"But," said he, "I must come among your people as one of them, else they will doubt my friendship. For this reason," he added, "do thou make for me a garment like the king's, that I may wear it when I go forth to meet him."

"Therefore," said Maya, "do thou, dear Zayi (for thou art skilled in embroidery), prepare for him a flowing white robe of finest texture, wrought with precious stones, and do thou, Ytzatil (for thou art apt in feather-work), fashion him a great crown of the plumage of the quetzal, our royal bird. None may wear it but those of kingly race, but is not a god greater than a king? I will give thee a gold fillet

to which thou shalt bind the feathers. And, Ikal, do thou bring me golden sandals and bracelets and a splendid necklace, and I will seek a sword from our armoury, and we shall lead the new god to the palace like a king."

And they willingly complied, for Maya had stilled their fears and it seemed to them that great would be their honour in thus bringing a god to the city to be the counsellor of Ahpula.

So day by day the princess tended the stranger, until his wounds were healed.

At the end of a fortnight the maidens brought to the senote the new garments which they had prepared, and Maya, telling them to wait in the thicket at a little distance from the cave, entered alone with the bright apparel and bade the stranger array himself and come forth into the sun's light.

When he appeared she looked upon him in astonishment. She had never dreamed that he was so stately and beautiful. His tall form, his white skin, his ruddy cheeks, broad brow, and manly features, his eyes like a reflection of the skies, made her almost believe that he must indeed be the god into whom she would fashion him.

So fair was he that Maya saw no need of bedecking him on face and neck and arms, as she had thought to do, with the bright colours that were the common decoration of the men of her race. Indeed some of the greater gods were without these ornaments and she well deemed that they might be omitted, since nature itself had so clearly stamped upon his features the image of divinity.

Still Sandoval spoke not of love. The desire of her heart was not fulfilled. Unless she should become his wife her plans would fail and she would see him slain upon the teocallis as an impostor. She had begun to divine that despair was the reason for his silence. If he would not speak she must herself ask him to be her husband. But if she should find him reluctant! The thought choked her.

Yet now was the time. She must not delay until the lord of Peten-Itza came, for then all hope of succour would be gone.

So in a low voice, that never before had trembled, she said:

"If I am to save thee I must be thy wife." And she dared not look upon his face for the answer.

Then all at once from his hopeless heart there broke forth such a torrent of over-mastering joy that he knew not what he did, but clasped her in his arms and showered kisses upon her brow and cheeks and lips and spoke such words of love as would only be defiled if they were heard by other ears.

Her maidens waited long for her in the copse behind the first turn of the path and wondered why it was that she delayed her coming. Doubtless there must be things of great importance which the god was telling her! And when at last she came, though she spoke not a word and none was asked her, they saw that her far-off eyes were radiant with joy, and they felt that the fair deity had blessed her and that the coming days would be filled with peace and happiness.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEW-MADE GOD

THE time had now arrived when the presence of the stranger could no longer be concealed. It would not do to wait until Canek should come to claim his wife and then break to him the humiliating news that she was to be the bride of another. She must be wedded first and word must be sent to him before he set forth from Peten-Itza.

So Maya sought an interview with the king and in the presence of the queen, her mother, she thus told her story :

"A week ago when I went with my maidens to the senote, one of them saw within the pool a beautiful god with fair face and eyes like the morning, and hair like the flax of the hennequin, and light curling beard. He rose from the water

and talked with me and told me who he was. He is the god whose coming was foretold in the books of Chilan-Balam. He has journeyed from the East and crossed the waters in a great canoe with wings, and he has come to unite the tribes and to make thee again king over all. He will dwell in the city and be thy counsellor, but he warns thee to make no league with Peten-Itza, for Canek is faithless and would strip thee even of Mani. The bright stranger has taught me the language of the gods and I am to be his priestess. He will soften the hearts of the tribes throughout the land and they will follow thee; and Uxmal, our ancient capital, shall be thy dwelling-place, and its glory shall be greater than of old.

"After he had told me these things he floated upward among the clouds and I could see him no more, but each day since, he has returned and I have brought him fruits and flowers. But until to-day he bade me keep his coming secret. To-morrow he will appear before thee, my maidens shall bring him to the palace, and thou and the high-priest and the nobles must meet him in the garden, and he will wed me ere the

sun is set, for he has bidden me abide always at his side, and he asks thee to make ready for us a chamber in the temple of the Sun where we may dwell together."

Now the king was greatly astonished at this speech, as well he might be. He believed his daughter, but it seemed to him that she might have been beguiled. So he summoned his chief priests and nobles and to them he told the story, and they held counsel together and one of them said :

"Let it be as thy daughter has spoken. Let us go before the stranger and let the high-priest ask him concerning the mysteries of our faith, and let the king question him regarding the secrets of the kingdom, and if he answer well concerning all these things, then shall we know that he is a god indeed, and he may dwell in the temple and wed the princess and be our counsellor."

And thus it seemed best to all. So messengers were dispatched throughout the city to bid the people prepare for a festival upon the morrow, if so it might be that the answers of the stranger were wise and true.

In the morning Maya went again with

her maidens to the mouth of the cavern. She entered alone and talked long and earnestly with Sandoval. She told him that she had spoken with her father and that a council had been held and all had been made ready to receive him. She taught him how a god should bear himself, and she added :

"Listen carefully to all that I shall say in thy name, then thou shalt know what to do. But speak thyself in no other language than thine own, for it must not be seen that in any point I am instructing thee."

Then they walked forth together into the sunlight, and at the first turn of the path they came upon the attendants of the princess, who were awaiting them under a great ceiba.

As they approached, the maidens fell upon the earth before him. He commanded them to rise, and all moved on together, the stranger first, then Maya, then her attendants. Upon his shoulder he carried the sword she had brought him. It was made of strong wood with sharp knives of flint on either side. His long robe was richly embroidered, and the bright quetzal

feathers of his crown danced in the sunlight.

When they reached the gate leading to the palace garden it was already open and within stood the king's guard, who, after making due obeisance, followed in their train.

Then they saw the king himself borne through the grove on a litter upon the shoulders of his chief nobles, with a canopy of glittering feathers above him and great fans waving at his side. He was followed by his priests and counsellors, and as they drew near, Ahpula descended and walked forth to meet the stranger.

Now Maya had instructed Sandoval that whenever he did not know what to do he was to make a short speech in his own tongue. This he did when he saw the king approaching, and the princess thus interpreted his words :

"Kneel, O king, receive my blessing, and kiss the sword I bring for thy protection."

The monarch obeyed, and all who saw it felt that here indeed must be a mighty deity !

Maya perceived from the reverent eyes

of the multitude, who remained aloof from awe and fear, that even before the questioning began her victory was won.

The stranger spoke again, and these were his words as rendered by the king's daughter:

"Thou hast done well, O king! Hereafter kneel no more, for thou and I shall walk together side by side, and I will be thy counsellor."

Following the king came the high-priest bearing flowers which, after due prostrations, he offered to the god. The answer was low and solemn.

"I take thy gifts," he said, "not that I need them, for how should he lack flowers by whose breath the plants grow and break into blossoms, but because the gift bears witness to thy reverent heart."

Thus indeed do the gods speak! Such was the conviction of all as the multitude prostrated themselves upon the ground, touched their fingers to the earth, and then placed them upon their hearts in token of worship.

CHAPTER XV

THE WEDDING

SO successfully had Maya conducted the interview that the high-priest was stricken with fear at the thought of putting questions to a deity, who might well resent any suspicions of his divinity.

And when they had come to the palace and ascended the steps of the terraces on which it stood, they sat together, god and king, on two small thrones under a canopy upon the platform in front of the royal chamber, in full view of the nobles who stood upon the terrace just beneath, and of the multitude who had gathered in the broad square still lower down.

After they were seated, with Maya standing at the stranger's side and the high-priest before them in his vestments, the latter began his questions in the form of a prayer

for advice, but couched in such language that it would need for answer a knowledge of the religious observances of the people. He asked how long it would be before the city must celebrate the festival to Chaac, and what ought to be the forms with which they should conduct their prayers and ceremonies.

The stranger spoke in the unknown tongue, and his young priestess thus declared his answer:

"O Ahkin Mai, why dost thou ask that which thou knowest already? Not twice eight times has the cross made its circle in the southern skies since thou didst climb the steps of thy teocallis and there didst put the self-same question to the stars, and they did answer thee. Why dost thou ask again? Men may be false, even the gods may beguile thee, but the stars never lie. Thou didst listen to their shining voices, thou didst cast up the hours and find that on the tenth day of the month of Mac the festival should begin. Nay, thou hast already given thy commands for every part of the solemn observances. Why should I repeat them? Thou hast no need of my counsel."

The eye of the priest quailed and sought

the ground. Here was a god who had not only known his deeds, but had divined his very thoughts! His voice trembled as he stammered an excuse.

"True indeed thou speakest, mighty one, but thy servant is old, and though the stars never lie, yet my poor eyes grow dim, and I may fail to read aright the message that they send. I would not dishonour our festival by beginning it at an unhallowed time, therefore I questioned thee."

But the stranger's answer showed still more clearly his omniscience.

"On every teocallis in this city there went forth that same night a priest who made report to thee. Every answer was the same. Surely thou couldst not doubt them all."

The priest was silent. He dared ask no more. That would be blasphemy, to be followed, doubtless, by some awful punishment! The stranger must be indeed the mightiest of the gods, for Ahkin Mai had never yet stood before any who could thus overwhelm him with confusion.

Then the king spoke. All doubt had now vanished from his mind, and his appeal for counsel was sincere.

"To that festival," he said, "will come Canek, the lord of Peten-Itza. He has asked the hand of my daughter, and I have promised it. He offers to aid me in overcoming the tribes that have rebelled against our royal house and in re-establishing my empire. Dost thou know him?"

The stranger answered long and earnestly, and Maya thus gave forth the meaning of his speech:

"I know Canek well, though he has never seen me. Before I came to thee I wandered in the guise of a serpent through the temples of Tayasal, and once I glided close to the lord of Peten-Itza at his council board, though none saw me. I heard him tell the dark designs he nourishes against thee, and I have come to warn thee. Thou hast striven against him in many wars; thou knowest that he is crafty and cruel. He has failed to overcome thee in battle, and he seeks thy ruin by stratagem and guile. He will come to thee with many warriors, speaking words of friendship and clad in the garments of peace, but underneath the girth-cloth each of his retainers will hide a sharpened knife, and at the banquet he will command them to drink

nothing, but to pour their cups upon the ground. Then when thy people have laid aside their weapons and have grown heavy with wine, his men will spring upon thee and will slay thy followers, and seizing thee they will bear thee away to offer to their gods in sacrifice. They will burn thy city and thy queen will wander homeless from land to land. Trust not the lord of Peten-Itza, for he is to-day what he has ever been, the chief among thy enemies. Nay, more; if thou wilt have me abide with thy people, then Maya must also stay, for the gods speak a tongue which is not like the language of men, though they hear and understand all that you say. I will counsel thee only through the lips of her whom I have chosen, and if thou wilt have me keep thee from evil and strengthen thy dominion, then I must wed thy daughter, so that she shall remain ever at my side. This very day must the rites be performed."

So the king gave orders for the celebration of the marriage and for the feast which was to follow. For this he did not ask the consent of his daughter; that was not the Maya custom. Daughters must obey, and

in the present case no daughter could be more willingly obedient.

There was of course less magnificence at the wedding than there would have been had more time been given to its preparation. But Maya, like the wise maiden that she was, cared less for the splendour of the occasion than for the life that was to follow.

In taking a husband of whom she knew so little, thou wilt say, reader, that she was not wise ; and thou wilt perhaps have even a graver fault to find with her for thus hoodwinking in such outrageous fashion not only her parents, but her people and the priests of her religion. Yet she did devoutly believe that some such calamity as she had prophesied would in all likelihood follow an alliance with Peten-Itza, and if so, how could she better warn her father of the danger than by announcing it to him as the prophecy of a god ?

To dwell far from home through the long years to come, in daily contact with the rebel lord — old, ugly, treacherous, and cruel — this was of all things what she most abhorred. And to live with the fair stranger she had rescued — surely the gods

would pardon much, knowing, as they must, how sorely she was tempted !

So the marriage rites were celebrated in due order.

"What simple folk is this," I hear thee saying, "to take a poor wanderer for a god !"

Are thine own people then so astute ? There are indeed no witches nowadays, and ghosts are much discredited, but did not thine own townsmen a few weeks since hold converse with some great soul in Elysium,—with Plato, or Confucius, or Washington, or perhaps with the spirit of his own wife, who wrote to him upon a slate the things that he had known for many years ? Did not thy friend commune with Chelas from the Himalayas ? Or hast thou not a brother at death's door, racked with disease, who tells thee there are no such things as pain and suffering ? Did not Moses talk with the Lord, did not Elijah mount to heaven upon a chariot of fire ? How then shall we, the children of light, wonder at those who, having not Moses or the prophets, believed in their wild fancy that some other god, as needful perhaps to them as Jehovah to the tribes of Israel, had come to dwell among them and give them succour ?

CHAPTER XVI

AT THE CHAMBER IN THE TEMPLE

THE wedding feast was ended. The guests had tasted to the full the short-lived pleasure of the wine-cup, not deemed by them a dishonour, but rather a temporary transportation to paradise, as the fit sequel of religious duties well performed. They had now sought their homes, for the night was far advanced, and Sandoval had been conducted with his bride to the appointed chamber in the temple.

At last they were alone ! The love which had been stifled through the tedious ceremonial and the wearisome hours of the long festival, now broke out in a passionate torrent from their hearts and lips. But even as he lavished his caresses upon the beautiful creature whom he held in his

embrace, the thoughts of his bride went on beyond the present hour of happiness into the future years they were to live together, nay, even into the eternity beyond.

"Most unworthy," she said, "will be our union if it be but for ourselves alone. Thou must become like the god I have declared thee. Thou shalt be indeed the deliverer of my people, and great will be my joy above all other women of my race, for thou canst not suffer me to stay at home when thou goest forth to council or to battle, but in every trial, in every danger, thy priestess must be always at thy side. We are joined together by no common bond ; in thought, and speech, and action we must be forever one.

"Long may we thus abide ! Long may the dread Yuncemil who cuts short men's days loiter and hesitate ere he lays his cold hand on thy golden hair. Let him rather strike me first, for not an hour could I outlive thee and hear men say that thou wert not a god. If perchance while I am yet alive the time shall come when disease shall hang heavy over thee and I shall hear the steps of death approaching, I will bear thee

forth alone into the forest, and hide thee where none shall know whither thou hast fled, and I will tell the priests that thou hast risen to the home of the gods and I will bid them offer me to thee in sacrifice so that together we may make the dreadful journey to the world of spirits.

"I will run to thee while my heart still smokes upon the altar, and thou must linger on the way until I overtake thee. I will not be long for I am fleet of foot, and we shall walk together between the lofty mountains that stand on either hand to crush the souls of the unworthy as they advance along the narrow pathway; but thee they shall not overcome, for with my great love I shall be with thee, and I will stay them and thou shalt pass unharmed. And when we meet the serpent whose huge bulk lies stretched across the deep valley beyond, we shall not fear him, for we know his sting destroys only the craven souls that flee. Then shall we bravely encounter the "wind of knives" and its sharp torments shall beat upon us in vain, and we shall cross the eight deserts and the nine great streams that flow around the islands of the dead. There I must rest a little on

thy strong arm, for thou knowest the ways of the waters and they shall not overwhelm us. *

"And when at last we come to the gardens of the blest, Ixtab the goddess will surely know the daughter of the king, and thee too will she welcome, for I will tell her that that art my husband and my love. And she will lead us together to Yaxche, the tree of life, whose green branches stretch over the clear waters, and there the maidens of paradise shall spread our tables and bring us food and wine, and I will sing to thee and we shall dwell in the cool shade forever.

"Thus will it be with us if thou first shalt die. But if I go before thee, when I come to the great tree, I will not remain, for paradise will not be paradise if thou be not with me to share it. And I will ask Ixtab, the queen, to change me into a bird and I will spread my wings and fly back to thy home—our home—and thou shalt see

* In this reference to a five days' journey to the world of spirits which is common to both the Nahuatl and Maya races, I have followed the more specific Aztec tradition, since that of the Mayas (although probably similar) has not been definitely preserved.

me on the boughs in the palace garden and sometimes I will fly in at thy door and perch upon thy shoulder and sing to thee as the birds sing in paradise, and thou shalt know from the song whether thou hast done the thing that Maya loves.

"In thy hours of joy I will sing loud and clear, and when thou art sad my song will be soft and low to bring thee comfort. Surely thou wilt not forget me! For if thou shouldst seek another bride my voice would choke and my wings would droop and I would hide from thee and mourn."

And the tears glistened in her eyes as she clung to him.

"Forget thee? Seek another bride?" cried Sandoval. "If my heart shall ever beat with any thought that is not entwined with the love of thee, let it be still forever!"

She released him and stood gazing into his clear eyes.

"Nay, thou must be true to me not in life alone, but even amid the shades of Mitnal. And when thou comest after me, I will be with thee on the dread journey. I will caress thy cheek with my bright plumage, and will sing a song of victory while

thou art passing through the dark terrors. I will tell Ixtab of thy coming and she shall prepare thy home and mine under the great tree and I shall become thy bride again and dwell with thee forever."

Sandoval, child of earth as he was, was more eager to enjoy the delights of the present than to dream of a future which could not increase his happiness. Moreover, when his bride talked of the Maya paradise and the dreadful journey which they must make together to reach it, he could barely comprehend her. He had been taught that all such things — the huge serpent, the strange gods, the transformation of a human being into a bird,— must be the offspring of incantations and witchcraft, the work of the devil, condemned by Holy Church, and therefore accursed.

But could the enemy of mankind speak through lips so tender and affectionate as those of his beloved? It could not be! As to her heaven and her heathen gods, why think of these when he was already in paradise? He was greatly confused by mingled emotions of love and duty, and he answered :

"Thou shalt speak with me hereafter of thy gods and thy paradise, and I will tell thee of mine, but to-night let us think only of our love": and as they walked on the narrow terrace of the temple he passionately declared that for him there could be no heaven that was not lighted by her shining eyes, and no earth that was not pressed by the footfall of her tiny feet.

But she was not content to put off the time when they should wholly understand each other. "Tell me now," she said, "the mysteries of thy faith."

Then he related to her in such rude fashion as he might, the story of the threefold Deity, the Father of all, the Son born of a Virgin who died upon the cross to save mankind, and the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. He told her of the saints and angels and the martyrs of the Church; he pictured the joys of heaven, with its great white throne and beatific vision; he described the trials of purgatory and the endless pains of hell. She listened eagerly, and when he ended, "Thou has not told me," she said, "whether in thy bright city of the blest I am to be thy bride? Shall we dwell there together? Wilt thou love

me as I love thee here? Wilt thou be my husband?"

He was silent, for he could not answer her. Across his memory came the crushing words, "They neither marry nor are given in marriage," words that he had not thought of for years, but now they choked him, for they seemed to stand as an eternal barrier between his religion and his bride. He stammered the reply that so great would be their happiness they would not miss the forgotten joys of earth.

"But didst thou not tell me there could be no heaven where my eyes did not shine? Didst thou not promise never to forget? Art thou content to be my husband for a few short years on earth? Thy love is not like mine."

And in sorrow her face fell upon his breast.

He stood long irresolute. He stroked her hair and caressed her, but could not comfort her. He could feel her low sobs upon his bosom. At last, with one overpowering impulse, he passionately held her to his heart and cried:

"Nay, I will never leave thee, neither in earth nor in heaven nor amid the pains of

hell! Wherever thou art, there will I be also. Beneath the great tree we will dwell together, and thy gods and thy paradise they shall be mine!"

Again she stood erect before him, and under the moonlight that shone full upon her gleaming eyes her face seemed glorified and transfigured by her joy.

Then they walked hand in hand into the bridal chamber and drew together the long, heavy curtains which shut out the world.

CHAPTER XVII

THE EMBASSY

IN the morning they were bidden to the royal council, for time was pressing and an embassy must be sent forthwith to Peten-Itza to break the unwelcome news that the king's daughter was already wedded.

But who should go upon this dangerous errand? By the Maya law the persons of ambassadors were sacred, yet no one dreamed that the ferocious Canek would observe this wholesome rule, for many a time before had the bearers of evil tidings fallen victims to his wrath. So none would venture forth.

Then some advised that the king himself should go to Tayasal with his whole army; others that he should await at Mani the coming of this formidable chief.

When the new god appeared in the assembly with his bride, after all had made due homage, they told him of their straits and asked his counsel. And this was his answer as declared by Maya's lips :

"It would be madness, O king, to go forth with thy troops and leave the city undefended, for we have other foes near at home, and while thou art away, at the utmost verge of the peninsula, the tribes of the north will fall upon those who remain and will lay waste the city and the fields. And shame would it be to abide here and tell the lord of Peten-Itza nothing of the things that thou hast done, but suffer him to come seeking a wife, and find himself betrayed. Then indeed in his wrath would he make a league with others, and they would overwhelm thee. But I alone will go as thy ambassador, for I am immortal and no weapon wrought by man can harm me. I will go with my priestess and we will tell him all. I will say to him that what thou hast done has been at my command, and I will bring rich gifts and offer him thy friendship and thy love. And if among thy nobles any shall be found who fear not to go with us, let

them follow in our train. If not, I and my priestess — we will go alone."

Then there was great gladness among the chiefs and all approved, and one said: "Here indeed is our deliverer, for he fears not to do himself the thing that he enjoins. Such a god will I follow with a trustful heart, for I know that he will keep us from all harm."

Then many others said they too would go.

None indeed gave praise to the king's daughter, who alone had planned this daring deed, for no one knew that it was her counsel. But she cared not for this; she was filled with a great joy, to see her husband honoured and obeyed. So on the same day, with a great train, they set forth together, and the new god wore the quetzal crown and four nobles carried him upon the king's litter, while his bride was borne behind him. And thus they travelled through the winding paths for many days. When they came to the great lake far to the south, wherein the island of Peten-Itza lay, they sent a messenger to tell the lord of the city that the king's embassy was waiting on the shore, and to bid him come

forth and meet them. And when the crafty Canek asked what might be the tidings, the messenger answered that he did not know; for he dared not become the first bearer of the evil news.

So Canek sallied forth, followed by a bright array of warriors, and they who waited on the strand could see the swift canoes approaching from the city of many temples and dancing upon the shining waves. When he reached the shore, Canek advanced, and the fair god with Maya at his side descended to the ground and went forth to meet him.

Now the presence of a woman on such an embassy was a thing unknown before in the history of that people, and the chief of Peten-Itza was astonished when he beheld her. But when they came nearer and Canek saw the thick tresses and dark eyes of the girl and her unconscious majesty, a great longing fell upon him, and he thought:

"When I am wedded to the king's daughter this maiden shall be my slave; there is none like her upon the earth."

For, never having seen the king's daughter, he knew not that it was she who was before him.

And when they met, the chief made his obeisance to the ambassador, who in that place stood for the king, and said :

"Thou who hast come from great Ah-pula, whose daughter is to be my bride, what message hast thou brought ?"

Sandoval made answer in an unknown tongue, and Maya thus interpreted the words :

"I come indeed bringing a message from the king, but I am more than his ambassador ; I am the god foretold in the books of Chilan-Balam and I have descended to earth to be the king's counsellor and his guide. Though I understand not the speech only, but the very thoughts of men, I will not deign to hold converse with them save in my own tongue. My priestess, who knows the language of the gods, is at my side ; she will tell thee the message that I bring."

The chief was disconcerted at this reply. He marvelled much at the appearance of the stranger. A being so fair and godlike he had never seen before, yet he was moved to doubt the divinity of one who thus came from the king without warning, and who might prove hurtful to himself in

projects which aimed at the final conquest of the kingdom. So with a slight sneer he coldly asked :

"What is the message?"

Maya's face flushed in anger at the chief's scant courtesy. Through her lips the answer of Sandoval was declared :

"The king sends thee rich gifts and seeks as ever thy alliance and thy love, but his daughter thou canst not have, for at my command he has bestowed her upon me and I have wedded her, and she has come with me, not only as my priestess but my bride."

A dark cloud gathered upon Canek's brow. The beautiful creature whom he saw before him was then the maiden to whom he had been himself betrothed, and she was already the wife of another! Unable to contain his wrath at the indignity cast upon him in the presence of his own warriors, he cried to them :

"Seize the impostor! Bring him to the city that we may sacrifice him to our gods. Let all who are with him perish save only the king's daughter, and bind her also, for she shall be my slave!"

But not a soul stirred. The speech and

the commanding presence of the stranger had filled with a strange awe the hearts of the warriors of Peten-Itza. It seemed to them that they were indeed in the presence of a deity. They feared their chief but they dreaded still more the retribution of the gods. They trembled and no man moved.

"Cowards!" shrieked Canek: "Must I show you with mine own arm that this pretender is no more a god than yourselves? Must you see him bleed?"

And springing back, he seized a bow from an attendant and sent an arrow straight toward the stranger's heart.

But Maya saw the act. Quick as thought she leaped in front of her husband and received the shaft upon her arm. Clear through the flesh it went and the arrowhead stood out upon the other side.

"No, love, it pains me not," she said as she saw the pitying eyes of Sandoval bend over her. And she broke the shaft and drew it forth and whispered, "I am not harmed."

Meanwhile the followers of the embassy had drawn their bows upon the rebel chief and Canek was compelled to take refuge

behind his warriors, who implored him to offend no further a deity whom he could not slay.

Muttering curses and threatening vengeance upon the king, the princess, and the pretended god, he turned with his followers to the boats and departed for his island city.

Sandoval sought to staunch his wife's wound by tearing his own mantle into shreds and binding them around her arm. But he was awkward and unskilful. The shaft had pierced a vein, yet he wound the cloth above and not below the place where the arrow had penetrated, and Maya was soon faint from loss of blood.

"Wind the shreds lower down," she said to him. She spoke low, but one of the nobles heard her, and the words sank deep into his heart.

Sandoval blushed with confusion at his lack of skill. His companions perceived it and could not help wondering why a god who knew all things had not from the very first done what was needful.

The princess swooned. Ever and anon when his voice called her name she would open her great eyes and look upon the face

that leaned over her with the same smile of unutterable tenderness that he had beheld when he first saw her in the cavern by the pool; then she would fall as into sleep again. They placed her in her litter to bear her home and Sandoval walked at her side, his gaze fixed unalterably upon her features. The poor exile was wretched indeed, forced as he was to keep silence while his one hope lay dying within the litter.

Whenever the bearers set it down he knelt beside it, closed the curtains, and pressed a kiss on her cold brow. With a powerful effort her eyelids would unclose, she would look upon him for a moment, and in a low voice would murmur, "I shall soon be well," and then would smile and sink again into unconsciousness.

At last, however, she rallied, and when evening came they gave her wine and food. Sandoval watched at her side all night; and saw that she was no longer in a swoon but sleeping quietly. And they bore her back in safety to Mani, where the king's physicians tended her with care and skill, till the wound healed and she grew strong and well again.

CHAPTER XVIII

REPROOF—INSTRUCTION

IN the meantime the news of what had happened spread through the city : and the people, though they were well pleased that the warriors of Peten-Itza had feared the stranger and had refused to stir against him even at the command of their own chief, yet all were greatly distressed at the harm that had befallen the princess, and they marvelled that a god who knew all things and could do all things should have suffered it.

When she recovered, Maya was called alone into the presence of the king for warning and reproof.

"Why was it," he asked, "that thou, knowing thy husband was immortal, shouldst fling thyself before him to stay the arrow that could not harm him ?"

And Maya answered :

"Father, I love him many times more than my life, and when I saw the arm of Canek lifted against him I thought not whether he was god or man. I saw only the arrow and my husband."

The king was softened by the answer of his daughter and proud that she had no fear. So he said :

"My child, I understand thee ; thou hast the heart of all our royal line. But put not again thy life in peril, for bethink thee thou canst not aid thy lord, and above all thou must not perish, for in thee is the hope of my people."

Then Maya returned to her husband in the temple.

A new matter now claimed her attention. It is not hard to see how inconvenient it was that Maya did not understand the Spanish language, and that Sandoval could not speak to his wife in the presence of others in the Maya tongue. All her interpretations had been simply the creatures of her fancy, and it must be clear to any husband what a hardship it would be thus to live helplessly at the mercy of whatever his wife might happen to say.

Sandoval indeed had never complained of this, but it was Maya herself who insisted that she ought to know the meaning of the unknown words he spoke to her.

So, day by day when they were alone, he taught her that soft speech which, like the Spaniard's smile, has oftentimes so well concealed the stern and cruel thoughts of those who uttered it.

Love is a skilful tutor, and the girl was soon able to understand and even to answer in rude fashion all that he said. What matter if the sentences were not grammatical? To those who spoke not the "language of the gods" this was unknown; if her husband could catch the meaning of her words that was enough, for from his lips she feared neither laughter nor reproaches.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SPY

GREAT was the dismay at Peten-Itza when Canek and his warriors returned. He called together his counsellors, the priests and the elders of the city, to incite them to vengeance, but those who had been with him to meet the embassy had brought back such tidings of the strange god, and the oracles had foretold such dire calamities if Peten-Itza should march against the king, that Canek found the attempt impossible. He must pursue his revenge by other means and defer his dark designs until some more convenient occasion. So for the time he yielded to the wish of his people and they remained at home.

There was, however, within the city one Bacab, a captive taken in one of the former wars with Ahpula, whom the lord of Peten-

Itza had spared from sacrifice. Bacab had a deep and crafty soul, so Canek summoned him to a secret interview and laid before him his purpose of revenge.

"Return," he said, "to the king's court at Mani, for I will make thee free. Tell him that I have repented and that thou comest to offer him my submission and my love. Then seek employment in some temple and lurk upon the footsteps of this strange god and his bride and watch their doings. I will send with thee trusted messengers, and if they can fetch me such tidings as will show to the king that the stranger is no god, I will come to Mani with my warriors and thou shalt confront him with me in the king's council. Then when I overthrow him I will make thee a noble and the chief of my household and give thee one of my own kindred for a bride and a great dwelling and a garden on the shore of the lake where thou shalt dwell in honour all thy days."

Among every people there are some base souls whose faith may thus be bought. Bacab took the tempting offer and journeyed to Mani, where he was welcomed by the king and his counsellors. Even the strange

god was beguiled, for was it not one of the kings' own subjects who had brought back the message? So in reward for his good tidings Bacab was appointed by Ahpula to serve as one of the priests in the temple of Echuah, the god of travellers and of the merchants who journeyed with their precious wares from land to land bringing the gold and copper and opals of Mexico in exchange for the delicate embroideries of Yucatan. To this god great deference was paid in Mani, since the prosperity of the city was largely due to the traffic upon which he smiled. His shrine was near the temple of the Sun, where Maya dwelt with her husband.

One brilliant moonlight night, when the whole city was asleep, Sandoval and his bride walked forth together upon the terrace in front of their chamber and looked upon the gleaming skies above them and then into each other's eyes, which mirrored the glory of the heavens.

Flinging her arms around the neck of her husband, Maya broke forth into passionate protestations of devotion. Sandoval sighed as he acknowledged that he had done little to deserve the wealth of affection thus

lavished upon a poor castaway. But she replied :

"Although thou art not the deity I have declared thee and though thou couldst not heal me when the arrow of Canek smote my arm, yet for this do I cherish thee the more. How indeed should I love one who had no need of my affection? How should I be the bride of a god who could not suffer and die?"

And Sandoval answered: "Too much do thy words prove. Precious as thou art in the eyes of thy father and thy people, thou hast little need of a poor outcast like me. Yet none the less will I love the bright face of her who redeemed me from the horrors of sacrifice and stooped from her high station to become my bride."

"Do I not need thee?" she answered. "Nay, the world would be a desert every hour thou wert not at my side." And their lips came together and her heart was pressed to his bosom. Then they retired hand in hand to their chamber.

That night as they lay side by side in the richly woven hammock within, Sandoval slept, yet the eyes of the princess were unclosed, for she was thinking how her

husband should lead their armies as the Nacon of the king, and bring back the tribes of the north to their allegiance.

Suddenly from a dark corner of the chamber, there came a rustling sound, and someone who had crouched there in silence stole forth, drew aside the curtain, and glided stealthily away. She could see the stars gleam through the doorway as he passed.

She leaped to the ground and followed, but when she went forth upon the terrace there was nothing—only the white city below and the shining heavens above. And when her husband, awakened by the quick movement at his side, asked what had befallen her, she told him and added :

"It must have been Xibalba, the evil spirit, 'he who vanishes,' for he has disappeared like a mist and the stars shine and all is well again."

Thus she spoke to comfort him, yet feared in her own heart that by someone they were closely watched and she added :

"Hereafter when we talk together, let it be in thine own tongue, for I would have no prowler at our side to report the things we speak of." And she could not tell what

more to think or do, nor could her spouse, "the god who knew all things, even the thoughts of men," say aught to cheer or counsel her. Through the long night she lay awake and trouble filled her breast.

CHAPTER XX

REVENGE

BUT the morning was bright and beautiful, her fears were stilled and for many days thereafter all went well within the city. An expedition was planned against the tribes of the north and her husband was made the Nacon to command the armies of the king.

Just as all was in readiness for their departure, a messenger arrived to say that Canek was approaching and asked to meet the king in council, for he had weighty matters to deliver.

So Ahpula assembled his counsellors under a canopy upon the terrace before the palace door, but he commanded his nobles to come armed with sword and spear, for the Nacon had warned him through Maya's lips of coming treachery. And the king

bade Canek approach with two or three of his chief men, no more, and commanded that they should lay aside their weapons before appearing in the royal presence.

The lord of Peten-Itza was filled with wrath at the mistrust of his sovereign, yet he could not now draw back nor could he say that arms were needful to one who was offering friendship and allegiance. So he appeared with two only of the chief men of his tribe. But those about the king saw with wonder that the priest of Echuah, who had disappeared from Mani a few days before, was also with him.

Canek fell to the earth before his sovereign.

"Grant forgiveness, O king," he said, "for my rash words and the violence I offered to thy embassy. So greatly did I love thee that my heart was filled with bitterness when I saw that the bride whom thou hadst promised to me was given to another. But I will make thee full atonement, for I come as thy faithful slave to show thee how thou art betrayed even in thine own household and to save thee from the shame and peril that surround thee."

Then Canek called upon the priest of

Echuah and bade him tell all that had happened on the night when he lurked in the chamber of the temple and heard the pretended god conversing with his bride. He told how they had confessed in secret that the stranger was no god at all, and could not heal the king's daughter of her wound, and that she had wedded him from pity, proclaiming him to be the thing he was not, and had stooped from her high station to become his bride.

Those who heard the story were dumb with astonishment. Silence fell even upon the lips of the Nacon, for he knew not what to answer. But Maya herself stood forth and spoke unbidden, and she asked :

"Wilt thou, O king, believe the tale of a base spy, who lurked within the chamber of the temple and vanished like the evil one?"

But the king answered, "Why is thy god silent? Why could he not heal thee of thy wound?"

And Canek cried, "Nay, let us try him here. Let him lay his sword aside and do thou give me thine, O king, and if he fall not, let me be offered to the gods in sacrifice! If he be immortal I cannot harm him,

but if he bleed, let his own heart smoke upon the altar!"

Then Maya spoke to her father again: "Bitter will be thy punishment if thou shalt suffer one of thy vassals thus to make trial of a god."

But the king answered her: "Out of thine own device hast thou spoken, not at thy lord's command. Let it be as Canek says."

Then the nobles took away the Nacon's sword and the king offered his own to the old chief.

"Nay!" cried Maya, as she sprang between them. "Not against the god but against thyself will he lift it!"

Now the king faltered and doubted what he should do. But the Nacon was unarmed and Canek saw his opportunity. Drawing from his girdle a sharp knife which was hidden in its folds, before Maya saw his purpose (for her face was toward the king and she was thinking only of the sword) he leaped like a tiger upon the stranger and thrust the keen blade into his shoulder.

The Spaniard with one blow felled his assailant to the ground, yet even while

Canek writhed at the king's feet he shrieked in triumph: "See! He bleeds! If he be indeed a god now let him heal himself!"

The impostor was unveiled. The victory of Peten-Itza was complete.

CHAPTER XXI

RELEASE

GREAT was the king's shame and greater was his anger. "Let the false god be seized," he cried, "and bind him for sacrifice. As for the daughter who has betrayed me, let her be kept within the penance chamber of the cloister of Ixnacan Katun, until her fate shall be decided, and let none see her save her guard."

Upon the lord of Peten-Itza he bestowed rich gifts and promised to grant whatever the old chief might ask.

The crafty soul of Canek was pitiless in vengeance.

"Let the king grant," he said, "that I may take the Nacon's place and lead his troops against the people of the north. And when they are subdued and we return in triumph, let me with mine own hand

(though there is little honour in the deed) sacrifice this false god to our offended deities, and at the same festival do thou bring forth thy daughter, and, commanding her that she eat with me the meat of the sacrifice, do thou bestow her upon me as my wife. I will know how to keep her so that she will not betray me."

And saying this, a soft smile stole over his hideous face.

And the king answered: "Go forth then as the Nacon of my army, for I know thy skill in battle, and I doubt not thou wilt return in honour and triumph. And the false god must indeed be sacrificed by the Nacon's hand, for this is his appointed duty. But let not Maya taste the food of sacrifice, nor wilt thou find it a light task to take her with thee as thy bride."

And Canek replied: "Only deliver her into my hands and, old as I am, I will find some gentle way to persuade her."

And his eyes glittered with the hope of his revenge.

So Canek led the armies of the king against the tribes of the north, and in two months they returned laden with booty and bringing many captives.

Then a great feast was ordained and Sandoval was brought forth with the prisoners on the appointed day and Maya too was bidden to the festival. During her captivity she had seen no friendly face ; she knew not what was to be her doom, nor had she heard aught of the fate of her beloved.

One treasure, however, had she kept to comfort her. In the struggle between Canek and Sandoval the knife that had wounded her husband had fallen to the floor close to her feet. She had plucked it from the earth and hidden it, and none had seen her at a time when all eyes were upon the old chief as he lay writhing on the ground reviling the pretended god—and the knife she kept (it was a small one) wound among the tresses of her hair, and cherished it above all other things.

When they brought her forth, clothed in festal garments, her face was very sad, but her eyes gleamed and her spirit was unshaken. She saw the preparations for the festival. Her husband stood a little way off with the other captives bound and ready for sacrifice, so she knew well the fate that was in store for him. And when the king came with Canek and she saw that the

chief of Peten-Itza had anointed with blood the long hair bound around his head, then she knew that it was by his hand her husband was to die.

But when her father told her that she was to become the wife of the old chief, she stepped back a little, so that no one could stay her. Then she drew forth the dagger.

"Dost thou dream," she said, "that for a single hour I would survive the sacrifice of my lord? Dost thou fancy that I would live one moment as the bride of his murderer? Nay, come not near, or at one blow shall perish the hope of thy royal line. Wilt thou have me slay also the child whose heart beats under mine? Then shalt thou be indeed the last of thy race and thy kingdom will be scattered among strangers. For my dagger shall not be put aside till thou hast freed my husband from his bonds and given me thy royal word that he may go forth in peace and that I may follow him."

Now behind Ahpula stood the queen-mother, who plucked his robe and besought him to speak with her, for she feared that he might suddenly advance to the place where Maya stood, and she knew well that this would be the end. And she said :

"Bethink thee, my lord, we must not lose our child. Long years have I watched over her and loved her, and she was ever the pride of thine own heart. Hard was it when at thy command I spoke not with her, nor looked upon her face during her long gloomy days in prison. Yet thou didst will it and I obeyed. Yet now, sweet lord, we must not see her perish. Thou must pardon her and the stranger whom she loves, and set him free."

Now, deeply as the king was offended at his daughter, she had been, as the mother said, the pride of his heart, and now he loved her perhaps the more for the fearlessness with which she had defied him. He would see her punished for her transgression, but he would not have her die.

Yet he could not grant her request and release the victim who had been dedicated to the gods, without a conference with the high-priest and with the lord of Peten-Itza. So when he had withdrawn with them alone into his own chamber for a parley, the high-priest indeed consented, for he had been the instructor of Maya's childhood and he loved her. He said that however great had been her sacrilege, the gods themselves

best knew how to punish it, and that Maya must not die while there was no heir to the throne.

With Canek the case was different. Though he now realised that Maya would never become his wife, yet he was stubborn in his thirst for vengeance upon the man who had robbed him of his betrothed. Still there were motives of policy which withheld him from his prey. The object for which he had sought the hand of the king's daughter had been that he might gain the regency, to which he would be entitled at the monarch's death. The king was a younger man than he, it is true. "But," thought the crafty lord, "he will not live long after an heir is born." For Canek had learned much from a great magician concerning the use of poisons, how to place them upon sharp-pointed twigs in treacherous pitfalls along the paths, how to secrete them in water jars, or even to pour them into the senotes, so that those who might drink should not know what it was that made them sicken and die. And the chief said :

"O king, if thou sufferest them to depart together, let thy daughter first swear

that she will send her child, when he is weaned, back to thy court. Then will I come to Mani and adopt him as my own and be his father, for was not thy daughter first promised to me, and is not that my right? And shouldst thou die before the child come to manhood let it be ordained that I shall reign in thy stead and the child after me."

And the king answered, "So shall it be."

Thus Peten-Itza stifled his revenge, but said to himself:

"It is only for a time. When I am ruler the altar shall smoke with their blood!"

CHAPTER XXII

EXILE

THEREUPON the king came forth and proclaimed that Maya and her lord might depart together from the city, but that they must dwell far from the homes of men, nor seek longer to abide with the people they had betrayed, and that when her child was weaned it should be sent to the royal court to be brought up as the heir to the throne.

Maya promised all, for she was eager to save the life of her husband, and being not yet a mother she knew not how hard it would be to keep her word. So Sandoval was released from his bonds and Maya's maidens gathered around their mistress to bid her farewell, and she asked:

"Will none go with us in our exile?"

And many answered, each one saying:

"I will follow thee," for they loved her greatly.

She chose from among them her best beloved, and the king also sent as their attendants a few of his most trusted men, for he would know whither the exiles were gone and see that they were watched and tended in their solitude.

They counselled together as to the place where they should dwell and Maya said:

"In Uxmal, the city of my fathers, let us make our home, for there there are stately dwellings, long deserted, and in them we may live together as becomes a king's daughter and her lord. Our love will grow the greater in solitude, until perchance upon some happier day we may return, and thou again become the leader of my people."

And Sandoval answered: "Whether we dwell in a palace or in the wilderness, wherever thou art it will be paradise."

Before the sacrifices had been celebrated they left the city. They were glad to escape the gloomy rites, for Maya abhorred as deeply as her husband the immolation of human victims, and the hearts of her maidens also shrank from scenes of suffering and death.

Maya told her followers that their course should be toward Uxmal and by way of Kabah — another deserted city — for from Kabah to Uxmal there was a causeway, which had been the king's highroad, and was easier to travel than the forest paths, though there were obstructions here and there, for sad had been the havoc wrought by hurricanes and warring tribes since Mayapan had fallen.

Upon the third day they came to Kabah, and Sandoval wandered with Maya among the lofty buildings that were falling to decay, with the long roots of elms winding around their masonry. They sat beneath the great archway and walked in front of the façades, that were sculptured as luxuriantly as the temples of Mother India herself; they examined the stuccos of struggling eagles within the halls and the columns of sapote wood carved with grotesque figures beside the doorways; they stood before a majestic building three stories high, where long rows of chambers upon the upper floors were approached by a broad exterior stairway of stone, a building which seemed to Sandoval one of the noblest structures he had ever beheld. Maya said

nothing but seemed lost in reverie, as if she were overcome by some unhappy memory, and he asked the cause of her sadness.

"This city," she answered, "was the first abode of treason. In Kabah dwelt the Dwarf who stirred the embers of revolt against our royal house. Shall I tell thee the story?"

Sandoval was eager to hear it and she thus began:

CHAPTER XXIII

AHCUNAL

"THE Mayas lived for many generations in prosperity under the Tutul Xius. Nohpat was the last king who dwelt in Uxmal. He reigned in splendour and his people loved him, yet no matter how joyous the occasion, he never smiled ; and men wondered at his secret grief.

"There was an ancient prophecy that in a certain year the sound of a silver *tunkul** would be heard throughout the land in harmony with the tinkling of a silver *zoot*,† that this was to be the signal of the monarch's fall, and that he who had made the sound would sit upon the monarch's throne. Nohpat knew that the time was drawing near for the fulfilment of the prophecy.

"Here in Kabah he built the palace upon

* A wooden drum much used in the Maya festivals.

† A musical bell.

which we are now gazing : he walked in the cool shadow of the garden, he bathed in the clear waters of the pool and strove to forget his doom, but the thought sat ever at his side that he was to be the last king of his line who should rule in Uxmal.

"In Kabah dwelt a woman, poor and old, but honoured for her wisdom and her knowledge of hidden things. She was a widow and of her descendants one only survived, her grandson, a dwarf, crippled in body, but crafty and of a daring spirit. Men called him the Diviner, Ahcunal.

"Now the widow knew the prophecy and she had kept for many years the magical instruments by which it was to be accomplished, but she feared to bring them forth, for the gods had foretold that he who won the throne should be accursed. So she buried her treasures and told no one of the place where they were hidden.

"Ahcunal guessed that his grandmother had a secret, for he noticed that she spent her days in meditation crouched in a corner of her cabin with her eyes fixed on a large stone in the middle of the hearth.

"At first he could not understand her conduct, but Xibalba, the evil spirit, floating

into the cabin at night, whispered to him in dreams that there was a treasure under that stone.

"The old woman went forth every morning to the city well for water and to the market for food, but always returned quickly lest someone should search the cabin while she was away. One morning Ahcunal made a little hole in the jar which she carried upon her shoulder so that the water would spill to the ground and she must remain to stop the leak. Scarcely had she left the hut when, pushing away the fire and cinders, he raised the stone and found beneath it the two silver instruments, both very old and beautiful. The Dwarf knew nothing of the prophecy, and without a thought he beat the *tunkul* and he shook the *ɂoot* until the sound was heard through all the cities of the land even to the mountains beyond Uxmal.

"The king upon his throne listened and trembled; then he asked counsel of the priests about him and they brought forth the records of the prophecy. It may be they owed Nohpat an ill turn, for they gave him strange advice. They told him that the only way whereby he might avoid his

impending doom was by calling upon the Dwarf to undergo with him a new and singular ordeal. Each was to cause four baskets of palm nuts to be broken successively over the head of the other, and when either fell so that he could rise no more, the survivor was to have the kingdom. So Nohpat gave the challenge and Ahcunal accepted it, for he counted upon the skill of his grandmother to protect him ; and he did not reckon in vain. She rubbed upon his head an invisible plaster of obsidian powder so hard as to defy the sharpest blows.

"The champions met at the appointed place, a basket filled with palm nuts was placed upon the head of the Diviner, and a strong warrior chosen by the king seized a club of stone and beat upon it with all his force. Four times were fruit and basket shattered but the Dwarf suffered no harm. Then Nohpat came down from his seat to submit to the same ordeal, but at the first blow he fell lifeless to the earth, and Ahcunal was carried to the throne.

"At first the new king reigned wisely. He refused to dwell in the palace of the Tutul Xius and converted that vast structure

into the great hall of justice. For himself he built a small but beautiful house which stood upon a steep and lofty pyramid and overlooked the temple where dwelt the virgins of the Sun ; and for the old enchantress he erected another building, upon a high mound a little distance off. She put the new king under the protection of Kinehahau, "The Child of the Sun," whose image was worshipped in the chief temples of the city, and she warned him that the god would cease to smile upon him if he failed to bring happiness to the people. Ahcunal promised her everything, but when after a few years she died, he forgot the lessons she had planted in his mind and became the slave of his own passions. He violated the sanctity of the vestals and turned their temple into an abode of debauchery. At last the god forsook him ; one night a great noise was heard in the temple of Kinehahau, and the next day it was found that the image of the deity had disappeared.

"But the Dwarf promised his nobles that he would put in the place of the vanished deity a still more powerful god. He called together his most skilful workmen

and commanded them to make for him a wooden idol, saying that he would give life to it so that it might be placed in the flames and they would have no power to harm it. The image was finished, but scarcely had it been touched by the fire before it was consumed. Then Ahcunal made a statue of stone, but it crumbled with the heat into a mass of lime. Then the king called together the potters and commanded them to make a god of clay. This remained long in the fiery element and then stirred with life, and the people fell upon the earth to worship it, for the Diviner had brought the spirit of evil into the new god.

"Then another wonder followed. One night all the gods of Uxmal disappeared, and as they went they cursed the king and the city; and Ahcunal filled their places with images of clay and to these the people gave divine honour until the dwellers in Uxmal became known as Kuul-Katob or the worshippers of clay idols.

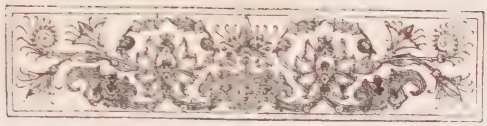
"But the king had loaded his subjects with such burdens that loud murmurs rose and at last the men of the provinces marched against Uxmal to overthrow the hated Dwarf. The city was taken and

given over to spoil and carnage, the Diviner perished on the threshold of his own palace, which he defended with desperate courage, and the dynasty of the Tutul Xius was again restored.

"But the people of Uxmal would no longer dwell in a capital which had been cursed and abandoned by the gods. So they moved the seat of government to Mayapan, which had long before been wrested from the Cocomes. The great city was rebuilt, and for a time the dynasty was re-established in all its power.

"But when evil is once planted, even though the first crop be swept away, many seeds remain which bring forth in time a plentiful harvest of suffering. The wicked deeds of the Dwarf were the beginnings of the sorrow which has fallen upon our kingdom.

"Thou canst not wonder, therefore, that I look with sadness upon the place whence sprang the parent of that brood of ills."



CHAPTER XXIV

LEGENDS

AND now the two exiles with their attendants followed the causeway that led from Kabah to Uxmal. There were no horses nor wheeled vehicles in those days and this road had been built for those who went afoot, for travellers and soldiers, for the runners of the king, for the men who carried litters, and for the merchants with their trains of burden bearers. It was eight feet in breadth and was laid in white smooth stones, lifted a little above the land around it, and the people called it Sacbey, "The Great Road."

The journey to Uxmal was not a long one. Proceeding in leisurely fashion, two days were ample for its accomplishment. Indeed even a few hours had been enough for the king's couriers when fetching news

for the monarch or bearing his commands to the subject city.

Now for the first time Sandoval and Maya began to enjoy together the wonders of the Yucatecan forest. On the embassy to Peten-Itza they had been borne in litters apart from one another, but now the Spaniard was no longer a god, but an exile, and could share with his bride the simple joys of the wilderness. So much better is it to be a man than a deity!

So he and Maya, loitering behind their attendants, listened to the hum of insect life and to the multitudinous voices of the forest birds.

"From these," said Maya, "did my people learn their music and the songs of the harvest, while the bees humming amid the blossoms taught them how sweet and honourable was daily toil. Proud is the warrior with his dancing plume, but just as honourable the husbandman who hoes his *milpa* and gathers the corn; and in the bright generations of our golden age the wars were few and the harvests were plentiful. There were no walls or turrets for defence, for none assailed, and the skilful workman was honoured alike with the chief.

"Listen to that song," she added, as an oriole above them poured all his soul into the melody he sang to the mother bird who was hovering above their hanging nest. "Couldst thou sing a strain more tender and affectionate?"

And as they listened to the notes, now high and clear, now soft and low, with the mother bird answering quietly and the little ones chirping while the breadwinner went forth and returned with some new morsel, Maya continued:

"Above all birds I love the oriole, for its destiny is bound forever with mine own. When I was yet a babe only a few days old, the high-priest brought me to the temple. There he burned upon the altar fragrant twigs and leaves and blossoms and then laid me naked upon the white ashes, which my tiny form pressed till they were smooth: then he bore me away and the next day came again to see what mark of living creature was upon the ashes. For whatever he should find, whether beast or bird or crawling thing, with that being my own fate was to be forever joined. In its joys would I find my happiness; if it languished I should be filled with sorrow, and

in the hour of its death my soul should also enter the land of shadows. And when the priest came again, he found the foot-prints of an oriole. Therefore I know well that somewhere lives the bright bird with black and yellow plumes, whose life shall bear the burden of my destiny. Somewhere in the forest she and her mate are singing now together. And if I die, it is into her form that Ixtab shall change me, so that I may sing to thee till thou thyself shalt come."

And after a pause she added quietly :

"But well I know no bird ever loved its mate as I love thee."

Thus talking they fared through the forest over the shining road. The blue eyes and the black came often together in their glances, and their joy was perfect.

Suddenly Sandoval started and drew back amazed. Across the pathway lay stretched beneath their feet a mighty serpent glistening in the sunlight. Its neck was long and slender and its graceful head was swaying to and fro. Black it was above and at its sides there fell deep streakings as if some dark fluid had been poured upon its back, while its belly was the colour of the red-ripe orange. Beautiful it was,

with its thick body and its tapering tail, but to Sandoval it seemed hateful, and he seized from the wayside a strong sapling to destroy it.

"Nay," said Maya, "it will not harm thee," and she stooped and lifted it from the path, stroking its neck until it lay quiet upon her shoulder, with its long form coiled around her waist.

"There are, indeed," she said, "serpents within the jungle that bring certain death to all they strike. Such thou mayst well destroy, but the things that harm us not, why should we slay them?"

A little farther on they heard a plaintive murmur, and upon the topmost bough of a small tree there perched a dove, Cucutcib, cooing for her mate. And Maya said:

"Look at that curving neck! Sometimes indeed I think she seems more tender and faithful than my oriole, but she is jealous of her love and once she left her nest because she doubted him. Dost thou know the story?"

Sandoval had not heard it, so Maya told the tale as it had been sung by the poets of her people:

"A faithful wife had been Cucutcib,

brooding over the tiny eggs in her soft nest. Then came the artful squirrel, tossing his beautiful tail, and he climbed up to a bending twig close to the quiet bird.

"'My friend,' he asked, 'why wilt thou always stay unsociably at home, and never join us when we make the forest merry with our gambols?'

"'My mate is absent,' answered the dove; 'I must not leave the nest till he returns.'

"'A pretty mate is thine, forsaken bird!' answered the crafty squirrel. 'I saw him to-day in a green ceiba, and he was wooing another!'

"Stung by these poisoned words, the dove forsook her nest and flew to the great tree, but she found not her mate, and when she returned the frail eggs were shattered, for the squirrel had devoured them and the shells were strewn upon the ground. Then the heart of the poor mother was filled with despair and she moaned in her sorrow '*Cuuc-tu-tuzen*,'—'the squirrel has deceived me'—and this is now her cry forevermore.*

"But think not," said Maya, "that, like

* See Le Plongeon, *Here and There in Yucatan.*

the dove. I would doubt thy faith, or leave thy home and little ones."

They walked on together far into the night. The air was balmy and it was late when they swung their hammocks from the trees.

Not far away they could see the lofty dwellings and temples of Uxmal. The moon was shining clear and cold full in the face of the great palace where Maya's forefathers had reigned for many generations.

This noble edifice appeared to Sandoval even more impressive and stately than the great mosque of his own Cordova. It did not cover the same vast area, but it had the advantage of a lofty position upon the summit of three successive mounds, rising one above another. And its gleaming wall was surmounted by a gorgeously decorated cornice, where grecques, masks, statues, and bass-reliefs were thrown together in confused luxuriance.

"Dost thou wonder," said the rich voice at his side, "that I treasure the memory of the city of my fathers? If Canek had not betrayed us — here should we have reigned."

And Sandoval sighed, thinking of the fair

days that might have been ; then looking upon the beautiful face at his side, he answered :

"But just as precious will be a quiet life with thee alone."

And she answered with her eyes though she spoke not.

CHAPTER XXV

UXMAL

THE next morning they passed over the land that had once been occupied by the great city. The dwellings of the people had crumbled, and fresh young trees had grown over them. The exiles now entered the inner precincts of Uxmal through the gate of what had been the city wall dividing the palaces and temples from the larger town without. This wall was built of stone, but it was neither high nor broad, for it had been intended, not for defence but seclusion—to keep the sacred city from the throng.

And now they ascended the three terraces upon which stood the palace of the king.* They walked around this noble edifice and looked into the chambers, swinging wide

* "The House of the Governor," as it is called to-day.

the great doors of sapote wood, richly carved. Within were dark rooms built of solid masonry.

Passing behind the palace, and a little to one side, they came upon the "House of the Turtles," on the second terrace, with its simple white cornice of columns, and Maya explained that this had once been the queen's dwelling.

Then they went on to the great building which to-day men call the Nunnery. It was composed of four long structures surrounding a wide courtyard. Entering this court they saw on each of its sides a façade of wonderful beauty. On the north a broad stairway flanked with piles of decorated masonry led to a high terrace, upon which stood a palace with thirteen doorways and over each door a triangular turret of richly sculptured stone. To the west was a range of buildings elaborately adorned, where two interlacing serpents were twined around the square panels of the cornice. To the south was another long structure with many entrances and over each the sculptured representation of a Maya cabin, with thatched roof and the image of a man in the doorway.

UXMAL. THE NUNNERY. CORNICE ON SOUTH FAÇADE

But the most exquisite of the four buildings around the courtyard was that upon the east side. Over a plain wall pierced by five entrances, there was a cornice of stone lattice-work with a border above and below. Over the middle door were three grotesque masks of human faces, one above the other, while in the lattice above each of the other doors were eight horizontal bars, with a serpent's head at each end. These bars increased in length as they rose from the door to the top of the cornice, and in relief against the three upper ones was a human face, with head-dress like those on Egyptian monuments, with rings in the ears and tongue hanging from the mouth.

Now to Sandoval it seemed that of all the buildings he had ever seen, there was none of more admirable design than this, and he well deemed that its unknown architect had been one of the world's great artists.

Just behind it rose the "House of the Diviner," * erected by the Dwarf.

Uxmal had been forsaken for several

* The House of the Diviner was built upon the summit of an artificial mound some ninety feet high and oval at the base. There were, indeed, two buildings on this mound, one resting on the platform on top, approached

generations. The forces of destruction are very swift in this fiery land of alternate humidity and drouth; a growth of small trees, bushes, and cacti had already begun to appear upon the stone roofs of the buildings and in some places the walls were beginning to crumble. But the noble structure on the east, "The Temple of the Sun," remained entire. The bright hues on its stone lattice-work had become dimmed, but it was all the more beautiful in its softened tints.

It was in this eastern edifice that Sandoval and Maya resolved to take up their abode, not only because the chambers were commodious, but because the temple itself had been linked with precious memories of the sacred order of which Maya had been the chief.

They chose for their dwelling the six apartments at the middle of this building, while the maidens occupied the rooms on each side, and the men sent by the king took up their quarters in the structure south of the courtyard.

by a broad, steep stairway from the east; the other, one story lower, overlooking the Nunnery, and reached by a similar stairway from the west.

Here, in the ancient sanctuary of the vestals, Sandoval and Maya dwelt together in such perfect joy as the gods grant only to lovers during the first bloom of married life. They wandered often among the buildings of the deserted city, and Maya told her husband the meaning of the sculptures and inscriptions. The feathered serpents coiled around the cornice west of the courtyard, one holding in its mouth a human head, portrayed, she said, the power of Kukulcan, intertwined with the wisdom of Zamnà, and holding in its open jaws the destinies of man. In many places there appeared the impression of a small red hand which seemed as though it had been dipped in blood and then pressed upon the wall. Maya said that each of these stood for Cab-Ul, "the working hand" of Zamnà — the power by which the wise god wrought his wonders; and that when men touched the sacred sign they felt the strength of the great healer and his inspiration.

But oddest of all to Sandoval were the "triangular arches" which he saw at different places on the outside of the buildings as well as the vaulted ceilings of the chambers within, which were built in the same

way. He wondered much at these curious structures and could not understand why there was no keystone. He spoke to Maya of this defect, but she did not seem to know what he meant. "How," she asked, "could they be better than they were?"

To us the making of an arch may seem a simple thing, yet mankind laboured many centuries before this thing was understood. The Mayas had come far along the pathway to that discovery, but they had not reached the end. Egypt never solved the problem, nor even Greece. In the arch of Mycenæ there is something quite like these structures of the Mayas. The walls come close together, but no keystone is laid above them. This does not mean that Uxmal has anything to do with Mycenæ; it means simply that the human mind, working in the same way through long centuries in lands far apart, sought by the same means to do the same thing. The problem was to span great spaces with small blocks of stone, and the Maya and the Greek struggled on in just the same manner towards its solution. It takes a long time for even a simple principle like that of the keystone to be fully understood, and when the Roman at last

UXMAL. THE NUNNERY. PART OF WEST FAÇADE

discovered it, he marked a new era in architecture.

Sandoval also noticed a number of flat stones on the terraces, which upon being lifted, opened the way toward cavities beneath. Some of these, as Maya told him, were cisterns, others were storehouses for grain, and when the city was abandoned many of them had been used as hiding-places for things of value.

One of these vaults which lay close to the building where they dwelt was, she said, a treasure-house, and when Sandoval went down into the chamber, he discovered a jar of terra cotta, curiously ornamented, and within, a number of valuable objects—images, amulets, gold ornaments, precious stones and, strangest of all, an ancient manuscript made of a paper of crushed maguey leaves, upon which was written in hieratic characters the history of the Tutul Xius. A strip of this paper several yards long and perhaps half a foot wide was folded like a screen so that it might be read first upon one side, fold after fold, then upon the other; there was no back to the volume, but the whole was bound between two wooden covers delicately carved, to

each of which an end of the paper was firmly attached.

As Maya and Sandoval examined the writing, she explained to him the nature of the characters. Whenever anything could be shown by a picture, the picture was made, but if the thought was one of which no drawing could be given, then an arbitrary symbol was used * and in a few cases, where neither the picture nor the sign was plain enough, the sound of the word was represented as in our own alphabet.†

Writing of this sort is hard to understand, but Maya had been taught the meaning of the signs, and without difficulty she read to Sandoval many chapters from the heroic periods of her country's history.

Such a manuscript might seem to us a crude jumble of bad pictures and unintelligible signs and yet to him who understands it it has a deeper meaning than the choicest engraving or the most delicate Elzevir, for, like the incomplete arch which shows the

* As in the Chinese language.

† Bishop Landa has since given us the Maya alphabet. The correctness of this is seriously questioned, yet there is little doubt that phonetic characters were occasionally used.

struggle of this people towards higher creations in architecture, it tells the story of their efforts to perpetuate their thoughts in written form. It shows on a single page the steps by which mankind advanced from the rough picture-writing of the savage to the alphabetic characters in which are preserved the masterpieces of literature and the sum of all permanent human knowledge. It is the living evidence of a great chapter in the history of the struggle of mankind from ignorance to knowledge, from darkness into light.*

*Several of these Maya manuscripts are still extant; among them the Dresden Codex in the Royal Library of that city, the Codices Troano and Cortesianus in Madrid, and the Codex Perezianus in the National Library at Paris, besides others in private hands. They contain records of a mythical, historic, and ritualistic character, and the efforts to decipher them have up to the present time been attended with only partial success.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CHILD

AFTER some months the child was born, a chubby boy with his father's blue eyes and fair hair.

But even with the first pressure of the tiny hand against her breast, Maya felt a stab as sharp as if a keen knife had pierced her heart. For with the dawn of mother love there came also the dreadful thought that this sweet treasure was hers only for the brief time of his nursing ; that just as the young soul would awaken and the childish prattle would begin, the beautiful boy would be lost to her forever. Nay, more than lost ; for in the slimy contact with Canek the name and memory of his mother would grow hateful to him.

But among the Mayas a child is not weaned until during the third year. There

was still a breathing-time for joy and tenderness.

"More than two years!" she thought; "that is a long while! So many things may happen! Canek is old, and ere that time the gods may call him to Mitnal. If he should die, surely my father will relent and my lord and I will go with the boy back to the palace, and in some happier hour the child shall reign and his father and I may still abide with him."

With each day that passed, the bonds of her love grew stronger, her hope more anxious, and her fear of the parting more feverish. The months went on until the child looked into his mother's face and smiled, and one afternoon, as the three sat together in their shadowy chamber, and the bright rays streamed through a narrow cranny at the side of the curtain drawn across the doorway, the child, sitting in his mother's lap, clutched at the shining sunbeams which glittered with those countless particles that float forever in the atmosphere. But the father's face passed in front of the line of light and when the little hand reached out, the gleam had vanished. The boy's eyes grew big with wonder.

Then the father's face was withdrawn and the child clutched again. Again the sunbeam disappeared, until seeing that face and shadow always came together, the chubby hand seized his father's beard with a shrill outburst of laughter at his great discovery.

What swift ways have these little ones to twine themselves about our hearts! How winsome are their trustful smiles! They cannot talk to us, but how perfectly we understand them! As the years pass and their words grow plain we may not know the meaning half so well.

One day they brought the boy to a chamber on the north side of the courtyard which they used as a place of worship. They placed him in front of the low altar upon which stood a curiously moulded statue of Ixchel, and the baby hands reached out to grasp it and to feel the rough, strange contour of the image. Maya held him back. Again and again he struggled to possess it, and still the mother's arm gently withheld him, until at length he gave over the pursuit of the forbidden pleasure. Yet afterwards, whenever he came near the image, his arms were stretched forth and his little fingers, again and again contracting,

though they might not hope to grasp the precious form, set forth more plainly than words his longing for the thing he dared not touch.

Thus do we stretch our hands, and He who knows all things may tell better than we whether the image we would clutch is worth the striving. Is it fame? Fame vanishes. Or riches, which moth and rust corrupt before our eyes? Or is it love? For pitiless Death hides even love within the tomb. We know not; we are borne hither and thither and with outstretched arms cry to the winds; and who shall answer us?

CHAPTER XXVII

THE GODS' DECREES

AFTER Uxmal had been abandoned and the surrounding *milpas* had become overgrown with rank vegetation, the neighbourhood grew to be unhealthy. There were marshy tracts without drainage and the great *aguada* which had formerly supplied the city with drinking water had now, after long neglect, become a stagnant, pestilential pool.*

* The *aguadas* were the public reservoirs built by the Mayas throughout Yucatan. They are immense structures for the keeping of water during the dry season. One of them is situated within half a league of Uxmal. Great trees hang over its borders and it now has the appearance of a natural lake. Yet when the dry season is prolonged and the water is withdrawn from the edges there can be found large square stones cemented together with other stones laid alternately beneath in many layers. Under the deepest part of many of these *aguadas* there

The Mayas, notwithstanding the instruction of Zamnà, were little skilled in the laws of hygiene, and when it was known that the few who remained near the forsaken city were stricken by disease, this was thought to be due to the wrath of the gods, who had cursed the place defiled by the evil conduct of the Dwarf.

Maya did not share this superstition of her countrymen, and she feared not to dwell amid the scenes that were dear to her. But on the other hand she could not know, nor could her husband tell her, of the miasma that lurked in the jungles around the ancient capital. It was her custom to bathe her boy frequently in the cool waters of the *aguada*, but it was not long before she saw with concern that the child, who at first had been so strong and lusty, now began to languish. He refused nourishment. He grew thin and weak, and each day, when

are also huge covered cisterns for the purpose of keeping the water which remained after evaporation and daily use had emptied the reservoir. When the *aguada* became dry these cisterns furnished the last reserve of the community. There were several hundreds of these structures distributed throughout the peninsula, a marvellous evidence of the industry and skill of the Maya people in overcoming a most serious physical obstacle — the lack of water

the fever came, his blue eyes would gleam for a time strangely and unnaturally bright, and then, when the fiery stranger had departed, would fade again and grow dim and lifeless.

Word was sent to the king of the child's illness, and one of the royal physicians came from Mani to heal him, but all was in vain. Each day the little voice grew fainter and the thin arms clutched the mother's neck with feebler pressure.

At last the final hour drew near and Maya's attendants stole from the chamber, for they knew that at such a time the parents must be left to struggle with their grief alone.

The boy lay upon his mother's lap within the shadow of the doorway. The father looked on in a dull stupor at the suffering of the frail body that was more to him than the wide world without, yet he so helpless to bring comfort or healing! He could not speak, he could not weep, he could not even feel. He fancied that the scene before him was nothing but a dream and he watched the passing of this precious life with almost the same indifference as if it had been a stranger or a beast.

He saw the sunshine creeping inward across the floor and thought that now it must be the middle of the afternoon.

He listened to a great fly that buzzed around him and reminded him, he knew not how, of his own country and some far-off time.

Then he wondered how he could be so callous in this great sorrow, and he dimly traced the footsteps of mercy even in his brutish insensibility.

Then his grief returned, and the old question came to him, the inevitable, the unanswerable, — why the Great Power who knows all and can do all should suffer these things to be, and his heart rose in rebellion against such a Providence.

When sorrow enters our doorway, how varied are the looks we cast upon the dark-browed stranger! The face of one is hardened by the marks of defiance, while the calm features of another are softened by the tenderness of resignation.

Maya felt more keenly than Sandoval could possibly feel the tearing of her heart-strings as the life fled from the little face that now breathed no longer against her bosom. Yet when she knew that all was

over, she looked up through her tears and smiled! Then laying the child upon the hammock and covering his body with her mantle, she turned to Sandoval, her arms stole quietly around her husband's neck, and she whispered:

"He is not far away, nor will he ever be. I shall sing to him over the little mound as I used to sing by the side of his hammock, and he will hear me just as well."

I think men cannot feel as strongly as women do the near presence of those who live no more. Sandoval did not seem to understand the words his wife had spoken. He gazed long upon vacancy, nor could he be aroused from his lethargy until he had looked into her shining eyes. Then the memories of a greater love awakened him, and he murmured:

"*Thou* art still with me," and his tears mingled with hers as they drew aside the mantle and gazed together upon the face of the sleeper.

Maya had no fear for the child upon his appointed four-days journey to the land of the spirits, for well she knew that the grim gods of death withhold their terrors at the passing of an infant's soul, and that the

children of paradise would come forth to welcome him.

And on the fifth day, according to the Maya rites, the child was buried in a little grave near the palace, and he sat upright in his narrow chamber while they placed upon his lap and in his hands the images and toys he used to love, and covered all with a great stone, and built a mound above him, where each day at sunset the mother came to sing a lullaby. At such times Sandoval was with her, but he sat at her side in silence, and he was less comforted than the mother, for he doubted whether the child could hear. Indeed, it was rather to please her than to satisfy himself that he accompanied her, for many times he felt a strange shudder as he gazed upon the things that brought to his remembrance that dreadful hour of death.

Sometimes Maya came alone, for such is mother grief that there are moments when even the dearest must not share it. And one day, while she was sitting by the mound and talking softly to the child beneath, she heard from a neighbouring tree the cry of a bird, and she found hanging from the branches the nest of an oriole

with one small fledgling whose parents had perhaps fallen victims to some beast or bird of prey, for the little one was deserted and alone. Well did Maya know that the tiny creature which had called to her was the soul of her own child, and that its cry was the answer to her song. So she took the nest and brought it to her chamber and cherished the small foundling till it grew strong and sang to her. But she would not fetter the little creature in a cage.

"As his soul grows," she said, "he must fly whither he will and be joyous and happy in the forest."

And the bird flew away, but often returned to be fed from her hand and caressed upon her bosom. And when it sped again into the forest she would say :

"He is growing strong and happy and I rejoice."

Yet her joy was darkened by the thought that her child had no longer the same need of her care and love. But she comforted herself with the reflection :

"In my dreams he can never grow old and strange to me. There shall I see ever the same baby face and feel the same

caressing arms, and he will remain my little one forever."

Often indeed she realised that it was better the boy had gone than that he should have lived to be consigned to the guardianship of Canek and brought up in forgetfulness or hatred of the mother who had loved him so tenderly. And when she and Sandoval spoke of it together they came to the conclusion that after all it might be that the decrees of the gods were wise and good.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CROSS

ONE evening Sandoval and Maya climbed the steep steps of the pyramid that rises to the lofty House of the Diviner. When they reached the summit they stood for a long time watching the groups of stars that blazed above them. It was a night such as is seen only in the tropics. The warm air was scented with a sweet aroma from the dense vegetation around them. The beautiful palace in which they dwelt lay at their feet. To the south rose the gables of the House of the Doves tracing a clear silhouette against the heavens, a little to the left was the stately palace of the king, while other pyramids and mounds beyond cast their sharp triangular outlines against the sky.

The Southern Cross hung low upon the

UXMAL. HOUSE OF THE DOVES

edge of the heavens, and although in this latitude it has not the brightness that it attains south of the equator, yet even here it forms one of the most remarkable constellations in the firmament.

"My people," said Maya, "like thine own, worship the cross, and there in the sky is its everlasting symbol. I rejoice that I saw it on our bridal night shining unclouded, for that shall still be to us an augury of happy days.

"Our great prophet, Ahcambal,* foretold that it was under such a sign that we must receive the bearded strangers from the East. But to thy people the meaning of the cross is not the same as with us. To them it stands for the suffering of a God that saved the world. With us it is the sign of the spirit of the four winds of heaven, whence come the clouds that bring the blessed rain which refreshes and restores the earth. Is not that a better meaning than 'a god in torment?' Little dost thou tell me of thy thoughts concerning the deep things that lie beyond the world—what then is thy belief?"

It would be hard to say what was the

* In the books of Chilan-Balam of Mani.

precise form of Sandoval's faith since his marriage to the Maya princess. He had joined her in the outward observances of her religion, though to tell the truth he put little trust in her grotesque gods and strange superstitions.

His faith was in that chaotic condition, common to many of the sons of earth, which followed no certain creed, but deemed that if men were to be judged it would be rather by their lives than by their beliefs ; that there was somewhere a protecting arm ; that in the great unknown there would be found shelter against harm and suffering, and that the beloved of his soul would be forever at his side.

Yet the roots of the faith of his childhood still clung to him and the memories awakened by Maya's allusion to the cross brought in their train a pang of regret that he had wandered so far from the path of his fathers.

So he spoke of the meaning of the sacred symbol with an earnestness and eloquence such as his wife had never heard before. The Maya tongue would not utter his full meaning, so he fell into his own Castilian. He told of the infinite gentleness of the

Man of Sorrows, of the lessons of humility and peace taught by the wanderer, of His willing sacrifice and cruel death—the sad story which, in its simple grandeur, is and ever shall be the wonder of the world, holding all men, believers and unbelievers alike, in reverent awe.

Maya, although she had learned the outlines of the tale on that first night at Mani, had never yet realised the beauty and majesty of the Christian faith. So deeply affected was she at the recital that she could not speak but took her husband's hand, and after he had ended they stood long in silence upon the high pyramid until the moon, rising deep red on the horizon, filled the sky with a spectral and supernatural light. They then descended hand in hand and betook themselves to their own chamber.

That night Maya dreamed. It was a weird phantasmagoria. First she seemed to be standing with Sandoval on the terrace of the House of the Diviner looking at the Southern Cross. Between the four great stars at its extremities a multitude of lesser ones appeared that grew brighter as she watched them until the whole formed a shining mass of light.

Then upon the cross there was outlined the form of a human figure, fair and beautiful, but with sorrowful and suffering countenance. Soon the constellations round about grouped themselves into the forms of children, and the little ones had wings and floated around the figure on the cross and sang as they passed, songs so soft and caressing that he smiled at them through his tears and pain. And among the children was her own boy, who, as he floated by, held out his little hands to the sufferer just as he had held them out in life to the image which he might not touch. Then the cross dissolved and bright garments fell upon the figure and it floated upward through the heavens, the children following.

And now from far beneath, the constellations grouped themselves again, and there were flames that leaped up toward the shining form, but they might not touch it, and amid the flames there was a countenance which Maya knew only too well, for it bore the cruel lips and leering eyes of Canek. His gaze was fastened upon one face, the face of her boy, and the old chief struggled to clutch him and drag him down into the flames. But the arms of the

beautiful being who had risen from the cross stretched forth and took the child, and folded him to his own breast, where he rested as quietly and confidingly as if upon the bosom of his mother.

And as Maya dreamed, her heart was filled with a great love for the bright god who had plucked her child from danger and sheltered him in his affectionate embrace. And when she awoke she turned to her husband and told him her vision, and she added :

"Thy god is better far than ours. Neither Zamna nor Kukulcan nor 'the Sun's Eye' is such as he. I too will worship him. Let me keep only my paradise and the birds that sing in the branches of the tree of life and in all else I will follow thee and thy God shall cheer and comfort us."

Thus it was that they established a composite faith, half Christian and half pagan —a faith that would not be at all satisfactory, I fancy, to the orthodox expounders of either religion —a most grotesque conglomerate, thou wilt say, and so indeed it was. Yet it gave them comfort, and was perhaps not harder to explain than are some of the tenets of thine own faith, reader, whatever that faith may chance to be.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE INVADERS

AND now there came to the king at Mani the news of bearded strangers who had landed on the coast near the north-eastern corner of the peninsula. The chief who ruled in that part of the country had lured them to his city and attacked them from ambush, but they had swords of a strange sharp metal which hewed to pieces all that stood in their way, and they carried weapons charged with thunderbolts which slew their assailants from afar, so there had been a great slaughter among the Maya warriors. At last the strangers had gone back to their winged canoes and now they were sailing along the shore, but great was the fear lest they should land again.

Such were the tidings brought by swift

couriers to the king, and the chief who sent them besought the men of Mani and the neighbouring tribes to arm and come straightway to the coast that all might fight together against the strangers.

Now the counsellors of Ahpula were divided. Some urged him to join the tribes of the north in driving out the invaders, while others said it would be unworthy of the king to make common cause with a rebel chief; and he was in sore doubt what he should do.

Then he bethought him of Sandoval, who might perhaps tell him what kind of men were these strange beings, and how worthy of his friendship, should he become their ally against his rebel lords.

So a messenger was sent to Uxmal to bid Sandoval come to Mani with all speed. The Spaniard doubted whether he should go; perhaps this was another trap set for his ruin. But Maya said:

"I will go with thee; and should they plot against thee I will bring to naught their devices as surely as I thwarted the schemes of Canek on the day he had appointed for thy sacrifice."

So they went forth together, and together they appeared at the king's council.

When Ahpula told him of the white men, Sandoval was strangely moved, for memories of his youth came back to him when he heard of the coming of his countrymen, and the thought dawned in his heart that perhaps the days of his exile were drawing to a close.

He told the king that there were none who could withstand the strangers, and that the better plan would be to join them and offer them his friendship. But when the king asked whether the white men would establish him upon the throne, Sandoval answered that this could only be if Ahpula should accept their religion for his own and acknowledge the great monarch who dwelt beyond the sea; for the Spaniard understood the ways of his countrymen and knew that no other peace could be made with them.

Those who sat at the council saw how his eye glittered when it was told him that his own people had come to the Maya land, and when he spoke of submission, they cried out against him, and declared that he who had been a false god in the past was now a traitor.

Had it not been that Maya was at his side it would have gone hard with him, but for her sake Ahpula would not suffer the hand of any to be raised against him.

Then the king sent his troops to the westward to drive away the strangers, for the word was that the great canoes had sailed thither.

First the army marched to Kimpech, the northernmost harbour that lay upon the western coast. Here they found that the white men had already come and gone.

The lord of the place had at first made them welcome, for he knew not who they were, nor had he yet learned the will of the king concerning them. So he had shown friendship to the foreign captain and clasped him in his arms, and each had worn the other's garments, and the Mayas had given to the newcomers all manner of provisions,—partridges, cocks, hares, venison, and bread; and the strangers had wondered greatly at the splendour of the city—at the square tower upon whose front was graven the image of a god with wild beasts on either hand, and at the serpent with a tiger in its mouth, all cut in stone and sixteen paces long.

But when the people of Kimpech saw that the strangers offered no worship to their gods, then the high priests brought forth a bundle of reeds and set it afire to show them that, unless they departed, when the reeds were burned they also would be consumed.

At last the Spaniards sailed away southward along the coast, and swift couriers were sent to Mochcovoh, who ruled at Potonchan, where there was another harbour and a city; and they warned him not to barter with the strangers, nor give them food nor water except in exchange for their own blood; and the king's army hastened thither to drive away the invaders.

At Potonchan there came forth fire and smoke and thunder from the great canoes, yet the Mayas were undaunted, and when the strangers landed, met them on the shore and hurled upon them stones and spears and arrows until at last they fled back to their vessels. Half their men were killed and well-nigh all were wounded, and the Spaniards departed in great sorrow, after their "bad fight." *

* The place was afterwards named by the Spaniards the bay of Mala Pelea. Cordova, the leader of this

The Mayas now believed that they were forever rid of their unwelcome guests, and great was the scorn cast upon Sandoval when the army came back to Mani.

The following year another fleet hovered along the coast. It followed the same course, and at Potonchan there was another battle, and again the Spaniards fared badly and lost many men.*

Once more the strangers departed and nothing more was heard of them till Cortes came. Nor did the Great Captain stay in Yucatan, but forthwith sailed on to Mexico.

Meanwhile Sandoval had returned with

expedition, died of his wounds a few days after his return to Cuba.

* Bishop Landa, who afterwards wrote of the event, tells us with great particularity that the leader Grijalva lost "a tooth and a half" in the struggle.

Bernal Diaz, a soldier who took part in the battle, also tells us: "We stayed four days in this place and I shall never forget it for the locusts that we saw there. These creatures kept flying in our faces and at the same moment we were attacked by a shower of arrows and we mistook the locusts for arrows. But as soon as we found out our mistake we deceived ourselves in another more dreadful way, for we now mistook arrows for locusts and no longer sheltered ourselves against them. We were severely wounded in consequence and found ourselves in a very awkward predicament."

Maya to Uxmal, where they lived together many years knowing nothing of the great deeds that ended in the conquest of the Aztec kingdom.

CHAPTER XXX

CONSOLATION

WHEN Canek heard the news of the death of Maya's child, which blasted his hopes of the succession, he shut himself in his stronghold among the hills of the south, and nothing more was heard of his alliance with Ahpula for the subjugation of the tribes. There was no open break between chief and king, for Canek hoped, if Maya had another heir, that his schemes might be renewed ; in the meantime, however, his thoughts were given to the strengthening of his power elsewhere so that he might aid either the king or the rebels and become the leader of whichever faction he pleased when occasion might offer ; and to all appeals for aid, the king had for answer nothing but postponements and excuses.

Years passed and the old chief lived on, yet he could make little headway in his schemes, and finding at last that he could not reach the throne, he determined to make sure of his vengeance. It was not long until he found an opportunity.

One evening a messenger came in haste to Uxmal, bearing a letter written upon bark, and when Sandoval examined it he found that it contained, not Maya hieroglyphs, but the script of his own Castilian. It was a poor scrawl, for the writer even in his best days had little learning, but Sandoval was able to make out that it came from his former companion, Guerrero. This was indeed a surprise to him, for he had not known that the old sailor was living.

The letter said that Guerrero was stricken with mortal sickness and implored Sandoval to come to him.

Maya, when her husband told her of the request, besought him to hasten to his dying comrade, and offered to go with him. And so, followed by their attendants, they set forth together through the wilderness.

When they came to Chatemal and were brought to the dwelling of Guerrero, Sandoval could hardly recognise his former

companion in the old man, hideously tattooed, and adorned with rings and barbaric ornaments, who lay upon a bed of mats within his lodge, while beside him stood his stout spouse with children of every age and size. But worse than his physical disfigurement were the traces of terror which overspread his countenance as he tossed from side to side upon his bed. Both in his dreams and in his waking hours he was tormented with remorse for his dreadful heresy, and images of the fiends and flames of hell came to plague him with menaces of endless suffering. The help of Holy Church was not at hand, and he had sent to Sandoval in his despair.

But it was Maya who brought him the comfort that he sought. She told him the vision she had seen of the sad and merciful god upon the cross who had plucked her child from the flames and folded him in loving arms. Such a god, she said, was able to save and to forgive.

So low was her voice, so earnest were her eyes, that the dying man looked upon her transfixed, and when she ended, a smile played upon his features as he sank to sleep.

He lingered for some days, but never woke to consciousness.

Sandoval remained in Chatemal until after the funeral rites were over, when he and Maya planted a cross upon the grave, and as they gazed upon it he said to her :

"With thee beside me it would be a joy even to die."

CHAPTER XXXI

CANEK

THEN with their train they journeyed back to Uxmal. On their way to Chatemal they had noticed that one of their attendants had disappeared. They had sought him everywhere through the forest, but he was not to be found, and the suspicion of treachery crossed the mind of Sandoval as he thought of the plots of Canek in the past.

On the third night, while they slept in a small grove that lay in a narrow valley with thickets round about, Maya was awakened by the cries of owls that seemed to be calling to one another more than they were wont, and she aroused her husband and asked him what might be the meaning of so many voices. Suddenly they saw a dark figure gliding from one jungle to another,

and they hastily aroused their attendants and stood upon their guard.

All at once a hoarse shriek rent the air. There were answering cries from every side and men rushed forth and sought to seize them in the darkness.

Had Canek been content to kill, this would have been an easy task, for his men greatly outnumbered the followers of Sandoval. But it was his plan to take his victims alive and offer them in sacrifice when he came home; and this was a harder matter than he had dreamed. Sandoval stood with his back against the broad trunk of an elm where the moon, shining red and low behind him, lighted the forms of his assailants while he remained in darkness. One after another of the men of Peten-Itza as they drew near were struck down by his heavy sword.

He could long have defended himself in this manner, but suddenly he saw two of Canek's followers steal up behind Maya, seize her, and drag her away. In an instant he followed and felled one of them to the earth; the other fled.

Sandoval now defied the lord of Peten-Itza to single combat, but he was answered

by a mocking laugh as his foes drew near from every side to cut off his escape.

But some of his followers, who had hidden at the first onset, now began to gather and attack their enemies in the rear, until a sudden panic seized the men of Canek and they fled. The old chief with wild imprecations sought to stay them, but in vain.

Finding that his prey could not be taken, he drew his bow and discharged an arrow at Maya; then he too turned and fled. The arrow struck her in the shoulder, but the wound was trifling, and she gave it little heed.

Sandoval followed close upon Canek's footsteps and at last brought him to bay. The men of Peten-Itza had disappeared, leaving their chief alone face to face with his assailant. He defended himself with desperate courage, but the struggle was a short one: with a great blow the Spaniard felled him to the earth where he lay still in death with a light of fierce hatred in his staring eyes.

Then Sandoval and Maya gathered their followers together and swiftly and silently made their way through the forest back to Uxmal.

CHAPTER XXXII

BEREAVEMENT

THOUGH Maya's wound was slight it did not heal, and day by day she languished until at last Sandoval knew that the arrow had been dipped in poison and that her life hung by a thread.

He sent to Mani for the king's physicians, but scarcely had the courier departed when there came by another road an embassy from Ahpula with an important message.

Sandoval went forth to meet the embassy at the city gate, and after he had made obeisance and the envoy had descended from his litter, they walked on, followed by their attendants, to the great building which in past times had been the palace of the king. When they had mounted the steps of the terrace and stood before the middle doorway with the great stone figure

of Ahcuitok above them, the ambassador spoke :

"I marvel," he said, "that the king's daughter is not at thy side, for the message of Ahpula is for her also."

Then Sandoval told him of the struggle in the forest, and of Maya's wound and her illness which was so great that she could not come to hear the message of the king.

"Therefore to me must thou deliver it and I will tell her all."

Then the envoy declared :

"Ahpula yearns to look upon the eyes and hear again the soft voice of his daughter. Long since would he have sent for her, but he well knew that Canek would stir the tribes to vengeance. Yet now that fear is past. He sends forgiveness and bids you return with me to Mani and be to him the same that you were in days of old."

Had this message come at any other moment it would have filled the heart of the exile with gladness, for he knew how dear to Maya was her father's love and how precious would be the long-delayed forgiveness. But now a fear came with the thought that haunted him, "Is it too late?"

He told the ambassador that when the princess grew strong again they would set out together and he sent to Ahpula fit words of love and gratitude. Then bidding his men serve the king's messengers with all they might require, he betook himself to his own abode.

The rooks circled mournfully above him in the sultry air, and as he passed through the triangular arch into the inner courtyard of his own palace, he cast his eyes up to the House of the Vestals to look for the smile which always greeted his coming. For even during her illness Maya had reclined in the doorway of her chamber ready to welcome him when he appeared. But now, for the first time in all the years they had lived together, she was not there to watch for his return. A great fear fell upon him; he hurried anxiously up the steps of the terrace and hastily entered the doorway.

At first he could see nothing, for his eyes had been blinded by the glare. Then he heard the low sobs of her maidens and gradually he saw the forms gathered around the hammock where she lay; but as he bent over it, and called her by the fond

names which had never before failed to draw forth a look of tenderness and an answering caress, she neither moved nor gazed upon him.

He could not let her thus slip away without a word ; he clung to her and bore her in his arms back and forth across the room; he sought by every device of affection to rouse her even for a moment from her lethargy, but all in vain. Sometimes his efforts were answered by a low moan of pain, and later, when in her delirium she spoke his name and words of tenderness broke from her lips even in madness, he sought to find in these the answer to his entreaties, but her eyes moved elsewhere and it was plain she knew not that he whom she had called was bending over her.

At times her words were wild, for the face of Canek was before her eyes, and as he seemed to spring from the flames to clutch her child, a wail of despair broke from her lips.

Her husband strove to comfort her with quiet words — words hard to speak while mortal fear and anguish tear the heart—telling her that Canek was no more and all was well. Then she smiled, for the vision

of the Christ form came to her, bearing her boy aloft through the myriads of bright stars into which the gleaming cross had melted, and she reached forth and took her husband's hand and said to him, "Now let us follow them!"

Thus the day passed and the long night after it, through which the phantoms chased each other in swift succession across her troubled soul. And Sandoval, as he hung over her and caressed her, prayed no longer that she might recover, but only that her quiet spirit might return, that she might speak with him those final words that are so precious in the hour of parting.

Yet what need even of this? Had not all things been already spoken? What further proof could she give of a love that had never faltered; what charge to one who knew during a life of utter confidence the inmost longings of her heart? For no look nor word had ever been put off till the final hour. So clear had been her life, so single was her heart, that her husband had shared with her each thought and wish, even as it was formed. Yet where is he who does not ask again the assurance of affection at a time when this assurance

must be the last? So Sandoval hungered for the final words of love.

His prayer was answered. On the following day, though she was very weak, her mind was clear and her old smile came back again.

He told her of the king's forgiveness and sought to cheer her with dreams of the new life they should live together at her father's court: but the voice that told her this was choking, for he knew even as he spoke that it could never be. And she answered:

"Nay, love, not there; for I must sleep a little with my child. But fear not — I will come to thee as I have promised, and in other days we shall still dwell together, not at Mani, but under the tree of life."

And while she spoke, the song of a bird, an oriole, was heard without the chamber. She knew the voice and listened, then, as it ceased, the smile upon her lips faded and the soft eyes closed in death.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE SONG

THOU wilt ask me, reader, why it is that I have brought my tale to such a pass that she who was its life and soul should perish. But is not that our common destiny? What more wilt thou have than a score of happy years with one thou cherishest? However brilliant thy career or proud thy station, thus it must end. Shall it be thou or thy beloved who must remain the mourner? Happy the souls that take their flight together!

When Maya grew still and cold in her husband's arms, the light of the sun went out with her and all things became grey in dull eclipse. The world was empty. When his child died she had been at his side to comfort him. But now, what refuge was there anywhere?

Dazed as he was, with no soft eyes to call him back with the thought "Thou art still with me," he became the prey to desperate resolutions. At first he determined to live no longer. He would join her, he could not remain alone behind. But something which came back to him from the faith of his youth warned him against self-slaughter, and he gave over his intent.

One day, while he lay alone within his chamber hopeless and desolate, he saw an oriole flutter through the doorway and light upon a strand of the hammock just above his head. The bird seemed to hesitate, then gathering courage it began to sing, soft and low at first, and as he lay quite still, he could feel it draw closer and even touch his face: then the notes were clear and strong, until at last he knew that the soul of her who had never parted from him in life could not stay away; that Ixtab had changed her into the bird and she had come back to him as she had promised.

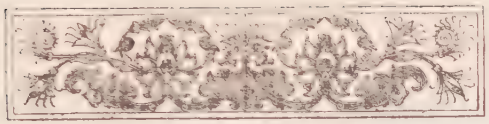
A wild fancy this, thou sayest? But in what better form might she appear?

My love, if thou shalt return from death's dark chamber, come not back to me with the unknown voice of a stranger, nor

speak in senseless scrawls, but come as a bird and I will know thee and caress thee and thy notes shall be a thousand times dearer than all messages that may be sent through alien hands. Love needs no alphabet nor syllables. A glance it was that awakened the first throb which stirred my breast. Let the last sound that soothes it be a song that has no words !

So it was a bird's voice that brought him back to earth and each morning, when he awoke with tearful memories, the bird fluttered through the doorway of his chamber and sang such notes as came never from the throat of oriole before, notes filled with sweetness, until life grew bright again and hope sprang once more into his breast.

When the king heard of Maya's death his heart was filled with sadness, and he sent to her husband asking him to bring her body to Mani and give it fitting burial: but Sandoval would not have it so, for he had laid her as she had bidden him, by the side of her child, nor could he tear himself away from a place made sacred by precious recollections.



CHAPTER XXXIV

SUBMISSION

HE lived alone for many years. During that time great things were happening in Yucatan, yet he heard little of them, for the wars and disasters that followed the coming and going of his countrymen did not disturb the deep calm which brooded over the forsaken city wherein he had made his home.*

* In 1527, after Cordova and Grijalva had successively been driven from Yucatan, Francisco de Montejo, who had been authorised by Charles V. to colonise the land and make slaves of the natives who resisted, had made many determined efforts to get a foothold in the country. He had fought with the natives a desperate two days' battle at the town of Aké, in the interior, and although twelve hundred Indians were killed, the invaders were merely able to hold the field without the power to follow the retreating foe.

In the following year Montejo established a small settlement at Chichen-Itza; but he divided his forces, sending his lieutenant Davila to Bacalal, on the south-

At last Ahpula died,* and Sandoval was summoned to the obsequies. The body of the king, seated on his throne and clad in royal ornaments, was laid away in the temple, his heart was burned with precious perfumes, the ashes were kept in a gold chalice, the priests sang his praises in poems reciting his great deeds, and a new monarch, a distant scion of the house of Tutul Xiu, followed him for a few brief years upon the throne.

But it was not long before the Spaniards came once more to Yucatan, and this time they came to stay.

At first a new league was formed against them, but after a fierce battle they remained masters of the field. The tribes, greatly disheartened, scattered to their homes and

eastern coast, to find gold. Those who remained behind were surrounded, but after a desperate battle they escaped at night, tying a hungry dog to the tongue of a large bell, whose ringing deceived the natives while the white men fled to the coast, whence they embarked for Campeche, where Montejo was joined by Davila.

But this settlement at Campeche did not thrive, and so great were the sufferings of the colonists that they abandoned the peninsula.

* A.D. 1536, as appears from the Maya Chronicle.

when, in 1540, the Spaniards founded at Kimpech the city of San Francisco de Campeche and advanced towards Tiho, a large town in the interior, with the intention of there establishing their capital, the young king saw that further resistance would be useless, and he resolved, by allying himself with the invaders and acknowledging the sovereignty of their distant monarch, to make the best terms possible for himself and his subjects. Sandoval was often called to the councils of the new king, where he gave always the same advice — urging friendship and submission to the strangers.

Finally in January, 1541, this last of the Tutul Xius, followed by his subject lords, appeared before the young Montejo, Adelantado of Yucatan, and yielded submission to the crown of Castile.

He was borne in a superb litter upon the shoulders of his nobles. When he drew near the Spanish leader, he descended, cast to the ground his bow and arrow, and raised his hands.

His followers in like manner laid down their arms and touched their fingers to the earth.

He brought food to the Spaniards. He knelt before the cross and asked them to tell him of their faith. He stayed long among them, and upon his return to his own city, he sought to bring together the other tribes and make them friends and vassals to the crown of Spain.

He sent messengers to many — among them to the lords of Zotuta, but Nachi Cocom, their chief, prepared a wild boar hunt, and invited the king's ambassadors, who, when they gathered for a feast under a great sapote tree, were slaughtered, all but one, whose eyes were put out and who was then sent back to Tutul Xiu to tell what answer the Cocomes made to the base proposal that they should bow to the yoke of the stranger.

But the resistance of the Cocomes lasted only a little time, and in 1542, on the site of the Maya city of Tiho, Merida was established and made the capital of the Spanish colony.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE ORIOLE

SANDOVAL now received from the king at Mani permission to go to his countrymen in their new city.

When he appeared, they were greatly astonished that one who had been so long in the land had come to them, but when men questioned him as to his past life, he answered in the fewest words and told as little as he might. He had been cast ashore, he said, had been a captive, had escaped the doom of sacrifice, had been a slave in the tribe of Taxmar, had fled and gone to the king at Mani. He had been driven from that city and had lived almost alone at Uxmal for many years.

Of Maya he spoke not a word, and as no man had a clew to his story, little was learned of what had befallen him.

The natives who knew of the episode of his brief godship, did not care to repeat the tale of their own folly. Moreover, during the lapse of years much had been forgotten, so there was little talk of his past career. Some of his countrymen thought, indeed, that there were things in his life which he wished to hide, but in reality his silence was due mainly to the fact that the events of the past had been laid away in one of the precious storehouses of memory, which were not to be thrown open to the world.

He dwelt for some years in Merida and became a leading citizen of the Spanish capital. Important matters were confided to him, for he knew the Maya language and the Maya ways as did none other in this infant community, and when the colony had been well established and land for a hacienda had been given to him, it was expected that he would take for his wife some one from among the Spanish families of rank and station who had migrated thither.

Among these the family of the Count of Millaflores was perhaps the leading one in the new society of Yucatan. His daughter,

"Maria de la Concepcion," or "Conchita" as she was called by her intimates, was a beautiful and accomplished maiden of eighteen summers. Although Sandoval was now of middle age, he was still a man of handsome figure and fine presence, with a romantic past, and more than all he was in prosperous circumstances. It was not therefore surprising that when his eyes fell upon the damsel, she returned his interest and loved him "for the dangers he had passed" with a devotion perhaps greater than that which he had sought to awaken.

So quickly do we forget past associations when their objects are no longer at our side, that almost before he realised it he was betrothed and the time was set for the wedding.

The day before the appointed ceremony he was taking his afternoon siesta in the garden of his hacienda. The surroundings of his new abode had been laid out with care. The copse had been cleared away, but there were great palms that waved their long leaves above him, and a majestic ceiba, a little way off, stirred its green branches in the wind before his eyes, as he reclined in his hammock and listened to

the dripping of the water that fell into an artificial pool near at hand.

Yet in spite of his prosperous surroundings he was not happy. A vague unrest troubled him which his recollections of the smiles and bright eyes of Conchita could not drive away.

Suddenly he heard in the branches of the ceiba the song of an oriole,—the same, as it seemed to him, that had perched upon his hammock at Uxmal and sung to him in his lonely chamber.

He arose and walked quickly through the garden. He sought to stifle the remorse which the song awakened. Surely the link between Maya and the bird was no more than fancy! The wedding was set for the morrow and he could not break faith with his affianced bride.

Yet the memory of the song haunted him all through the sleepless night, and he thought he could see the flutter of wings athwart the moon as it rose behind the ceiba.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE NUPTIALS

IT was in a grove outside the city of Merida that the nuptials of Sandoval and his young bride were to be solemnised, for the foundations of the cathedral had just been laid and no church had yet been built of sufficient size to hold the throng. An altar had been raised upon a small eminence overlooking the town, and many dignitaries of the church officiated. The new bishop of the province was to receive the sacred vows.

The Spaniards in the city had come forth in great numbers, and upon the outskirts of the assemblage were multitudes of natives, drawn thither from curiosity to see the spectacle.

The solemn chant of the priests and acolytes had ended, and in the silence that followed, just before the final vows which

were to unite Sandoval with his destined bride, there was heard the voice of a bird ; and an oriole which had been fluttering in the air now descended and perched upon the hand that held the ring.

The apparition startled even the by-standers, for never before had they seen a bird of the forest so daring.

But Sandoval alone knew its meaning. A deathly pallor fell upon his face. The scenes of his past life thronged back to him. The present became a puppet show — a dream. It was only that past which had reality — the time when Maya had told him of the great tree in paradise — the time when he had sworn never to forget and had invoked upon himself the most terrible curses if his heart should beat for any other than his Maya bride. And her words echoed in his ears : "If thou shouldst seek another, my voice would choke and my wings would droop and I would hide from thee and mourn."

And now indeed the poor bird had hidden in the folds of his garments and the voice which called to him was choking with despair.

Then his own words of aforetime re-

sounded in his ear as if echo had been chased to her innermost sanctuary :

"Nay, I will never leave thee, neither in earth nor in heaven nor amid the pains of hell! Wherever thou art, there will I be also. Beneath the great tree we will dwell together, and thy gods and thy paradise they shall be mine!"

Just as the final words was put to him, just as his lips were opening to pronounce the vows, he fell.

Every effort to arouse him was in vain, and it was soon clear that he had passed beyond all human aid.

Great was the consternation, the assembly broke up in disorder and none could understand the cause of his sudden death. Some said, indeed, that it was a retribution come upon him for deeds of wickedness during his unknown life in the wilderness.

Apoplexy, the doctors called it, and so no doubt it was.

And those of his household bore him back to his own home. Preparations were made for his burial with all due rites, for Mother Church allowed him a resting-place in holy ground.

But those who entered his chamber noticed that two orioles that had been singing in the window took their flight to the great ceiba which shaded the mansion. There the song of the birds resounded loud and clear, and at last side by side they spread their wings and soared away together into the blue sky.

CHAPTER XXXVII

CONCLUSION

CONCHITA was swiftly consoled, for a younger and wealthier man soon took the place of the one who had so suddenly failed her.

The Spanish power in Yucatan was gradually consolidated and the natives, reduced to vassalage, were treated with that cruelty which has been the shame of Spanish dominion everywhere.

The chiefs of Peten-Itza in their island stronghold maintained their independence for some time longer, but toward the end of the seventeenth century, Tayasal too was carried by assault and given to the flames, and a great part of its population was put to the sword.

The manuscripts of the Mayas were destroyed by order of the new bishop, and

many of the temples were torn down and the stones used in the construction of new cities. Yet Uxmal, which had been already deserted when the invaders came, was suffered to remain, neglected by Maya and Spaniard alike, and its great buildings stand to-day the brightest illustrations of the splendour of aboriginal art.

He who looks forth from their terraces over the waste of wilderness finds himself asking, "Where is the great metropolis of which this group of palaces and temples was once the crown and diadem? Where is the Moscow of which this was the Kremlin, the Athens of which this was the Acropolis? Where is the multitude to gaze upon the royal pomp of which this was the setting?"

Ere the chill of night shall come, let us climb the steep ruined steps that lead to the House of the Diviner. Yet take heed! One slip will send thee headlong. At the top, the wind blows hard and we must steal cautiously through the arched chambers, from whose doorways the magicians used to read the stars and foretell all things. A good place this for the Black Art even now, if the Black Art can find a refuge

anywhere. The ruins lie scattered at our feet and a great past speaks to us in inarticulate accents :

"Such was I—such am I to-day. And you who despise my gods and my kings and my prophets—you who say that I am the work of the savage—how will men speak of you after the centuries shall have rolled over your heads and some 'higher civilisation' shall have risen on the ruins of your own? Will the future know more of you than you know of the builders of Uxmal? Are you wiser and worthier than they?"

L'ENVOI

Wilt thou say, reader, that the story I have told thee is incredible, that in our Western world there were no lands so weird, no caverns so fantastical, no ruins so majestic, no pomp and pageantry like that I have described?

I answer thee that I have seen them all. I have trod the terraces and chambers of the palaces, I have lain in the shadows of the senotes and dipped my hot palms in the cool waters of the pools: I have seen with the eye of history the battles, the sacrifices, the stately ceremonies. All but the living actors were before me.

And the chief of these, I know her too. For if thou sayest that no Maya ever lived, I will tell thee that I have walked at her side for many years.

She is of another race indeed, born under colder skies, but her face and form and bearing, her gentleness, her constancy, and her unflinching heart, these are the same.

The birds alone are the children of fancy, and if their notes shall not be heard in the dim future of which we dream so much and know so little, who shall come back from that untrodden realm to tell me I am wrong, and who shall say that Maya's paradise is not as bright a goal for longing hopes as gates of pearl and streets of gold and the eternal monotony of twanging harps around a great white throne?

THE END.